TALKING PEACE WITH GODS

Symposium on the Conciliation of Worldviews
Part 1

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PREFACE TO AN INTRODUCTION

The introduction to this symposium consists of its first two contributions: a cosmopolitan proposal by Ulrich Beck for negotiating between worldviews, then a warning from Bruno Latour against presuming we know what a conflict of worldviews entails. I would like to point out, as a preface to that introduction, that whereas versions of this discussion used to center on the question of commensurability—are worldviews comparable, let alone reconcilable?—the discussion here centers on problems of commensuration. How is it to be done and who might accomplish it? From commensurability to commensuration is a long trek, and we should feel self-congratulatory at this juncture. Historic events have turned the Linguistic Turn guild from theory toward—if not practice, then at least talk of practice.

The contributors to this first installment of our symposium would have been, let me hazard, Left Kuhnians back when that term meant anything. During the time of dispute over Thomas Kuhn and incommensurability, the Right Kuhnian position was that commensuration between discrete contexts does not occur. Whereas our contributors imply or state that commensuration is the most difficult of all things not impossible (emphasis on both "most" and "not"). Our

Common Knowledge 10:3

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contributors, I imagine, regard the Kuhn debate as antique, but it seems to me that its structure is still with us. Richard Rorty wrote in these pages, years ago, that Latour makes even postmodernism appear "*vieux jeu*." In his response to Beck's peace plan, however, Latour guards the Right flank of the Left Bank. Beck hardly qualifies as a "metaphysical prig" (that's a mean term of Rorty's)—but then neither, let me suggest, does Jürgen Habermas. And Beck here accuses Habermas of more or less what Latour indicts Beck for presupposing. Thus the structure of the old debate holds even when participants are in basic agreement with each other. No one wants to be caught arguing for contextless truth: whoever is closest to the "view from nowhere" is accused of revanchist optimism.

As Latour says, this dispute is among friends. But in "friendly disputes," the emphasis should fall on the adjective and not the noun. It is vital to our moment of self-congratulation to acknowledge that this symposium involves neither, on the one hand, idealist universalism nor, on the other hand, contextualism of the absolute kind. Our contributors stand in the zone between Henry Hardy and Stanley Fish. The assertion Fish makes that "different games are different games" (an assertion made most recently in criticism of Habermas) is not echoed here. Our contributors do not presume, as Fish does, that it is easy to tell what game is being played (J. G. A. Pocock writes, in this issue, about the pains historians take to discriminate among language games). Nor does this symposium rehearse the argument that Fish makes, in a recent critique of Rorty, that giving up "context-transcending norms" will not make you "better, less dogmatic, more open-minded." Fish says of Habermas's ideal of communication that it is "so special as to be impossible"—and of Rorty's connecting postmodernism to humility, Fish rules: "this is just wrong." In the course of issuing these judgments, Fish proves his main point, that "someone who holds pragmatist views . . . can be as authoritarian as anyone else."

Elsewhere on the spectrum—and (unlike Fish) unaffected by Kuhn—is the enlightened authoritarianism of "we liberals." Recoiling from the hope that "committed believers" in this or that dogma can discuss their differences amicably, Henry Hardy finds optimists guilty of five kinds of sweetness: "homogenized fudge," "illogical fudge," "evolutionary fudge," "evasive fudge," and "euphemistic fudge." Sickened, Hardy concludes:

> No amount of sophistry can cloak the propensity of organized religion to sponsor beliefs held with an overweening certainty that is always liable to slide into intolerance or violence. What is needed is not the recalibration of institutional religion, but its demise. The absurd circle-squaring of religious leaders who maintain that everyone can retain their beliefs full-bloodedly without risking internecine clashes is long overdue for exposure. When a lion approaches, we do not take it for a peacemaker.

I may be less bold than Hardy, but when in lion country I would travel with a lion tamer. Hardy should read "Wittgenstein's Lion," an essay of Vicki Hearne's published here more than a decade ago: Hearne agrees with neither Hardy's view of lions nor Wittgenstein's. Hardy senses the approaching lion does not intend communication; Wittgenstein regrets that lions cannot communicate *with us*. The difference between those views of hostile aliens is important, but the upshot for each is the same: business as usual (lion trophies, hunter deaths, and zoos).

Hearne was a Wittgensteinian but also a trainer of uncompromising animals: she was confident that she could talk to them and modify their worldviews. Lions, she wrote in *Common Knowledge*,

> have personalities, temperaments, moods—and they are sometimes voluble about all of this, sometimes chatty, at other times (when they are working) radiating a more focused informativeness. Nor are the exchanges and the work suffering-free. In particular, they are not free of the sufferings that accompany failures of understanding, refusals and denials of the sort that characterize many human relationships. . . . something happens in lion training that is in part possible because of the trainer's literacy, his capacity for mediated knowledge, that is nonetheless a transcendence of the noise and skepticism that are the inevitable accompaniments of mediated awareness. . . . But lions do talk, though largely not in words, and I am not the first to discover that exchanges—that is, second-person grammars—are an important mode of knowledge. And a mode that fails continually, so often indeed that its successes have an arcane and dubious look about them. What is being evaded here is what Stanley Cavell calls tragedy, a process that includes denying in one way and another the consciousness of the other.

To evade this tragedy we train ourselves—those of us who are able—to talk to predators and help them understand us. "There are enormous problems in attributing language to animals," Hearne confessed, but then added that the problem for philosophy is "greater than the problems involved in talking to [animals]." "What I hear," she concluded, "in the triumphant announcements that the ape-language experiments failed is an enormous sigh of relief." Likewise in discussions of jihad—there is a global sigh of relief that being fought will free us to fight rather than tame our opponent (and be tamed by him).

The question, in other words, is not whether worldviews are commensurable. The question is whether we should do what it takes—all that it takes—to communicate and reconcile with those we fear. There are perhaps things worse than terrorism and war. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro underscores that differences of worldview can be so fundamental and unobserved that reaching disagreement is a milestone on the road to consensus. "Intercommunicability" between perspectives, he shows, is not out of the question, but the achievement is extremely dangerous. Scholars and journalists, democrats and diplomats, talk metaphorically, and thus optimistically, about communication and exchanging perspectives. Yet we know in other contexts that exchange (the exchange of bodily fluids, for instance) is not always wholesome and that communication (many diseases are communicable) can be deadly. Perspectives—ontological perspectives—are communicated and exchanged in this way: they are traded, transferred, inverted, unpredictably crossbred, and often lethally transformed. Exchanging perspectives is, Viveiros de Castro shows, a business for shamans, who can resist "ontological predation." According to Tobie Nathan, only "strange human beings who . . . love their neighbors' gods" can perform this service. Jeffrey Kripal calls them "gnostic diplomats" (and reveals that they live on campus).

But whoever—let us admit it—takes on the task is going to end up with dirty hands. This job is not one for contextualists in white gloves. (Vicki Hearne was a contextualist in muddy boots.) There is no clean methodology for reconciling worldviews at odds. In the second installment of this symposium, brave souls (including one liminal archbishop) will take steps toward reconciliation, not only of religions with one another, but of good method with expansive morality.

—Jeffrey M. Perl

Symposium: Talking Peace with Gods, Part 1

THE TRUTH OF OTHERS

A Cosmopolitan Approach

Ulrich Beck

Translated by Patrick Camiller

The "cosmopolitanization of reality" is, contrary to conspiracy theories of various sorts, an unforeseen social consequence of actions directed at other results in a context of global interdependence and its attendant risks. These cosmopolitan side effects, often undesired and mostly unintended, frustrate the equation of the nation-state with national society and create new transnational forms of living and communicating, new ascriptions and responsibilities, new ways in which groups and individuals see themselves and others. The result, at the level of opinion, is or could be a realistic cosmopolitanism or cosmopolitan realism—as distinct from cosmopolitan idealism (and distinct also from universalism, relativism, and multiculturalism). Realistic cosmopolitanism, considered apart from any philosophical prehistory, responds to a fundamental question about what I have called "second modernity."[1] How ought societies to handle "otherness" and "boundaries" during the present crisis of global interdependency?

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[1] "Second modernity" (rather than "postmodernity") is my preferred term for our present historical phase, in which modernity has become reflexive and is now modernizing its own foundations. See Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992), and Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition, and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994).

Common Knowledge 10:3

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To answer that question, it is necessary, first, to distinguish the various ways in which societies handle otherness now—universalism, relativism, ethnicism, nationalism, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and so on—and then relate each of these alternatives to the social formations of premodern, modern, and postmodern times. What we will learn in the process is that each alternative is guided by a set of contradictory impulses. Universalism, for example, obligates respect for others as a matter of principle, but, for that very reason, arouses no curiosity about, or respect for, the otherness of others. On the contrary, universalism sacrifices the specificity of others to a global equality that denies the historical context of its own emergence and interests. Relativism and contextualism are likewise self-contradictory: stress on the context and relativity of particular standpoints has its source in an impulse to recognize the otherness of others. But, conceived and practiced in absolute terms, that recognition is transformed into a claim that perspectives cannot be compared—a claim that amounts to irremediable mutual ignorance.

From these observations it follows that realistic cosmopolitanism should be understood, fleshed out, and practiced in conscious relation to universalism, contextualism, nationalism, transnationalism, and other current approaches to otherness. The cosmopolitan vision shares with these a combination of semantic elements that, at the same time, serves to differentiate it from all other approaches. Realistic cosmopolitanism presupposes a universalist minimum that includes a number of inviolable substantive norms. The principle that women or children should not be sold or enslaved, the principle that everyone should be free to speak about God or one's government without being tortured or threatened with death, are so self-evident that no violation should meet with cosmopolitan tolerance. There can be talk of "cosmopolitan common sense" when there are good reasons to assume that large majorities would accept such minimum universalist norms.[2]

Cosmopolitanism, if it is realistic, also will accept a number of universalist procedural norms of the kind that make it possible to deal with otherness across frontiers. Realistic cosmopolitanism must thus confront the painful question of its own limits: should recognition of the other's freedom apply equally to despots and democrats, predators and their prey? Realistic cosmopolitans, in other words, must come to terms with the idea that, in making respect for the other the heart of their program, cosmopolitanism produces enemies who can be checked only by force. The contradiction must be embraced that, in order to protect one's basic principles (the defense of civil rights and difference), it may in some circumstances be necessary to violate them.

[2] See, in *Common Knowledge* 1.3 (winter 1992): 12–29: Sissela Bok, "The Search for a Shared Ethics"; Amartya Sen, "Three Questions"; Bok, "Three Answers."

As for nationalism, a realistic cosmopolitan will take its continuing existence as a given but will work to develop cosmopolitan variations on the nation-state, national society, and patriotism. Without the stability that comes with national organization and feeling, cosmopolitanism can lose itself in an idealist neverland.

The Two Faces of Universalism

How the Western world should handle the otherness of others is not a new question. There are striking resemblances between the terms of discussion today—exemplified by such books as Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996) and Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History* (1989)—and the terms of debate at the legendary conference of 1550 in Valladolid, Spain. Comparing the questions under dispute—in 1550, the extent to which Amerindians differed from Europeans was at issue—should help clarify what we ourselves are arguing at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Huntington's influential argument is that, whereas the main lines of conflict during the Cold War were openly political and derived their explosive nature from considerations of national and international security, the lines of conflict today correspond to major cultural antagonisms involving a clash of values between civilizations. The culture, identity, and religious faith that used to be subordinate to political and military strategy now define priorities on the international political agenda. We are witnessing the invasion of politics by culture. Divisions between civilizations are becoming threats to international stability and world order. The democratic values of the West and the premodern values of the Islamic world stand opposed to each other in ever more menacing and hostile ways, both within individual countries and between different regions of the world. As to Fukuyama, his simplistic view is that, since the collapse of the Soviet communist system, there is no longer an alternative to the Western model of liberal democracy and the American-style market economy. "Democratic capitalism" is the genuine core of modernity, which by its own inner logic must spread through and refashion the world. Thus, a universal civilization will arise that brings history to an end.

Variations on these ways of handling otherness confronted each other at the Valladolid conference nearly five centuries ago. Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, an Aristotelian philosopher, and the Dominican priest Bartolomé de Las Casas represented, respectively, a universalism of difference and a universalism of sameness. Sepúlveda argued, as Huntington does today, that human groups are defined hierarchically, while Las Casas, more like Fukuyama, maintained that civilizations are fundamentally similar. Sepúlveda emphasized the differences between Europeans and Amerindians: the latter went around naked, sacrificed human victims, made no use of horses or asses, were ignorant of money and the Christian religion. He accordingly structured the human species into peoples that, while living at the same time, were at different cultural stages. In his eyes, *different* meant *inferior*; and it followed, viewing barbaric America from civilized Spain, that man was the god of man—some men the gods of other men—and that subjugation could be a pedagogic responsibility.

Similarly, Huntington conceives the relationship of the Western world to its cultural other, the Islamic world, as one of vertical difference. "Others" are denied sameness and equality, counting in the hierarchy as subordinate and inferior. From that point it is a short step to treating others as barbarians, which means that they must be converted to the superior values of Christianity or democratic capitalism, or else must be resisted with military force. The basic distinction between Huntington and Sepúlveda is that, while the latter's sense of superiority is easy and assured, the most striking thing about Huntington's diagnosis is its apocalyptic tone: a new "decline of the West" is inevitable unless we join hands to battle against the "Islamic threat" on behalf of Western values.

Las Casas eloquently defended the rights of the Amerindians and saw them as remarkably similar to Europeans. They fulfilled the ideals of the Christian religion, which recognizes no difference in terms of skin color and racial origin: they were friendly and modest, respected interpersonal norms, family values, and their own traditions, and were thus better prepared than many other nations on earth to embrace God's word. In the name of Christian universalism, this Dominican vehemently opposed hierarchical differentiation. Against the principle that held others to be axiologically subordinate, he argued for the dissolution of differences—either as a present fact of anthropology (all humans are human) or as an inevitable development of human progress (modernization).

Universalism, then, sponsors more than one way of handling the otherness of others. For Las Casas, a Christian universalist, it is not otherness but sameness that defines the relationship between the other and ourselves. In any form of universalism, all forms of human life are located within a single order of civilization, with the result that cultural differences are either transcended or excluded. In this sense, the project is hegemonic: the other's voice is permitted entry only as the voice of sameness, as a confirmation of oneself, contemplation of oneself, dialogue with oneself. An African universalism, for instance, would hold that the good white has a black soul.

Even the United States, which is home to all ethnicities, peoples, and religions, has its own variety of universalism and an ambivalent relation to difference. To be an American means to live in the immediate proximity of difference, which often further means living in Huntingtonian fear that a stress on difference will spell the decline of the West—a fear that ethnic differences can never be bridged and that, without assimilation to an American identity in which differences are transcended, the chaos raging beneath the surface will emerge. This fear demands and promotes a compulsion toward sameness and conformism. The greater the diversity and the more unbridgeable the differences that appear and are staged, the louder are the calls for conformity and national ethos (in the American academy, this development is known as communitarianism).[3]

From Paul of Tarsus, through Kant and Popper, to Lyotard and Rorty, variants of the same dialectic serve to limit the danger of ethnic difference by stressing a common humanity—by recourse, in other words, to Western universalism. From this perspective, ethnic diversity does exist but has no intrinsic value such as universalism claims for itself. Take the case of Christian universalism and the opposition between Christian and heathen. This sort of universalism releases all from their attachment to skin color, ethnic origin, gender, age, nationality, and class, and addresses them as equal before God in the existential community of Christendom. The duality thus belies the asymmetry that it posits. As Reinhart Koselleck puts it: "The opposition between all men and all the baptized is no longer quantifiable as the previous tokens were, but involves a reduplication of the reference group itself. Everyman must become a Christian, if he is not to sink into eternal damnation."[4] Imperial Christian universalism accordingly released emancipatory impulses that can be traced down to the modern movement for the abolition of slavery. Feminist movements have also made reference to Paul. But in these contexts as well, the dual face of universalism is visible: the blackness of blacks, the womanhood of women, the Jewishness of Jews, are stigmatized as "particularisms" inferior to the humanity of humans. Anyone who rejects universalism supposedly fails to recognize the higher morality that distinguishes it and becomes liable to a verdict of amoral or immoral particularism.

In such an atmosphere, particularities tend to seek transfiguration and displacement in the direction of universality: the majority raise their own ethnicity to absurd heights and proclaim their own norms as universal. In societies where whites are dominant, being white is the privilege of not noticing one is white. The postulate of abstract identity puts pressure on the ethnic other to yield to the dominant identity and give up the insistence on difference. If blacks, Jews, Chinese, Japanese, and women then call themselves black, Jewish, Chinese, Japanese, or female, they in this context lack theoretical and philosophical authority—they are not up-to-date, they are imprisoned in an antiquated self-image. To put the point as a mainstream sociologist of modernization might: the otherness of others is a relic that modernization reduces to eventual insignificance. Las Casas and Fukuyama represent the disappearance of diversity as a civilizing process—in the one case, through baptism and, in the other, through the infectious superiority of Western values (the market economy, democracy). Then as now, no alternative route is acknowledged. The way forward is Christian/Western universalism. Clearly, the "end of history" began some five hundred years ago.

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[3] There is therefore a close connection between the popularity and political effectiveness of communitarian currents and Huntington's catchphrase, which maintains that the intention of destroying civilization can be found only in non-Western societies and non-Christian organized religions. This position typically excludes in advance two alternative accounts: it is nowhere considered possible that barbarism could break out again in the West itself; and no systematic attention is given to the potential for conflict to feed off the effects of global interdependence.

[4] Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 231.

But Western universalism, again, has two faces: it also promotes the principles of liberty and equality throughout the world. It is not possible to proclaim global human rights, on the one hand, and to have a Muslim, African, Jewish, Christian, or Asian charter of human rights, on the other hand. To respect the otherness and the history of others, one must consider them as members of the same humanity, not of another, second-class humanity. Human rights infringe the local right to wall off cultures from external pressure or assault. Respect for traditions that violate human rights is taken by Western universalism as tantamount to disrespect for their victims. The dilemmas that stem from this attitude are not easily resolved. Raising questions of global responsibility leads to accusations (and to the temptation) of colonialism. Colonialism is now called humanitarian intervention. Still, with all of us faced with the risks of global interdependency, can the affairs of others be regarded purely as their own responsibility? Is there no option other than interference? Liberians—who for two decades had to endure war, banditry, and a succession of criminal regimes—took to the streets to ask the United States to restore order by force. In such instances, it is universalism, cosmpolitan sympathy, by no means greed or ambition or self-aggrandizement, that lead to the engagement of foreign armies. "Human rights colonialism," that hybrid, may well be practiced more and more widely in the form of "UN protectorates"—beginning with Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia, moving through Afghanistan and Iraq, on to Liberia and elsewhere they may yet be needed and desired.

The Two Faces of Relativism

To oppose universalism is to support relativism—or so matters appear to those who think in terms of either/or alternatives. Whereas universalism removes the protective boundaries around the cultural other, relativism permits, constructs, and imposes new ones. Where and how the boundaries run or are drawn depends on whether the relativism in question is associated with nationalism, localism, or culturalism. Since relativism aims to underscore all the distinctions that universalism wants to transcend, relativism of whatever kind tends to reject even the possibility of recognizing or developing general norms. Such norms have to be imposed and so, from the relativist's perspective, universalism and hegemony are merely two aspects of the same phenomenon.

Relativism, like universalism, is dual. Universalists impose their standpoint on others yet take the fate of others as seriously as if it were their own. The duality of relativism is complementary. On the one hand, a dose of relativism may serve as an antidote to the universalists' hubris. Relativism and contextual thinking sharpen our respect for difference and can make it both attractive and necessary to change perspectives with one's cultural other. But if relativism and contextualism are made absolute, this attentiveness to others turns into its opposite: any change of perspective is rejected as impossible. The instrument by which we close ourselves to others and reject any outsider's perspective on our own culture is the incommensurability principle. If everything is relative, then everyone is simply "like this" or "like that"—no more to be said. Ironically, the relativist's principle of incommensurability has much in common with its supposed opposite, essentialism. Both are compelled to accept things as they are. There is a will in both to be left in peace and to leave others in peace, on the grounds that the trenches between cultures can never be crossed. However polemical and wrongheaded the motives behind it, the presumption of incommensurability does lead to a nonintervention agreement between cultures—though, in a world where it is impossible not to intervene, where intervention is always under way, that agreement can easily veer around into violence. What is more, a strict relativism, however coherent (or no) philosophically, is historically and empirically indefensible. It fails to recognize, or it distorts the facts concerning, the interpenetrating histories of supposedly incommensurable cultures. Moreover, the cultural boundaries that relativism reifies are the project of a particular time (the nineteenth century) and place (Europe).[5] Those boundaries are oddly out-of-date and provincial.

But there is no reason that universalism cannot modify to take account of such realizations. A more contextualist universalism could acknowledge that cultural interpenetration is historically the normal case and that nonintervention is certainly an impossibility now. The effort to escape from the crisis of global interdependency into a fantasy of separate worlds is comical and quaint. Let me ensure there will be no complaints about false counterpositions: the opposite of the incommensurability thesis is not an assertion that dialogue takes place easily, meaningfully, and constructively. The true counterposition to incommensurability is: there are no separate worlds (our misunderstandings take place within a single world). The global context is varied, mixed, and jumbled—in it, mutual interference and dialogue (however problematic, incongruous, and risky) are inevitable and ongoing. The fake joys of incommensurability are escape routes leading nowhere, certainly not away from our intercultural destiny. The object of debate should be not whether but the how of mutual interference, of further mixing and confrontation. We cannot stand back from Africa's parlous state, because there is no Africa beyond the West's sphere of security and responsibility. That truth is not absolute does not mean that there is no truth; it means that *truth* continually requires an updated contextual definition.

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[5] See Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Bernard McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); William H. McNeill, *Polyethnicity and National Unity in World History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

The Two Faces of Nationalism

Nationalism handles otherness strategically and borrows freely from all the strategies that I have already described. Nationalism tends to take a hierarchical approach (like that of Sepúlveda) to its external relations, and takes a universalist approach (like that of Las Casas) to the relationship among groups internal to the nation. Nationalism moreover tends to adopt a (we might call it) territorial relativism with regard to national boundaries. In other words, nationalism denies the otherness of others internally, while producing and reifying it externally. To be sure, there can be politically effective solidarity with others who are defined as like us and therefore have the duty to pay taxes and the entitlement to social support, educational facilities, and political participation; but this sort of cooperation stops at the garden fence and may indeed function to deny other nations equal rights, to classify them as barbarian, or to make one's own nation barbarous.

This territorially restricted compromise among relativism, the universalism of difference (the hierarchical approach), and the universalism of sameness is typical of what I have termed the "first modernity." This compromise is used not only to maintain opposition between barbarians and compatriots but also to establish a somewhat parallel relationship between the internal "majority" group (as defined nationally) and internal "minorities."

The Two Faces of Ethnicism

One argument recently mobilized to enable retreat from global interdependence comes from the arsenal of anticolonialism: "Algeria for Algerians," "Africa for Africans," "Cuba for Cubans." Paradoxically, these solutions involving ethnic territorial autonomy have also been taken up by Europeans, so that the slogan "Europe for Europeans" becomes a means of mobilizing people against a supposed invasion by Turks and Russians. To maintain these fantasies of independent life, common ground between ethnic groups has constantly to be removed from view. Modernization comes with an impression of freedom, and if it coincides with discrimination and extreme poverty, those who suffer social exclusion may respond by closing themselves off further still. In many parts of the world, there is a danger that autistic ethnicism, charged with a modern consciousness of freedom, will wreck the nationalist compromise—to their own hurt, for that compromise recognizes minority rights.

Nonviolent coexistence with those who are culturally different must be part of the definition of civilized society. None of us can count on being shown the tolerance that we deny to others. Neither violence to ourselves nor affronts to our own dignity give us the right to treat neighbors as aliens and use violence against them. We certainly cannot (as we sometimes hear) excuse a Palestinian woman who blows herself up in a café filled with Israeli women and their children. What we can do, though, is understand that the differentiation and exclusion involved in an emphasis on ethnicity involve as well a dynamic of violence in which the minimum requirements of civilization are at last rendered irrelevant.

The Realism of Realistic Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism, again, means a recognition of otherness, both external and internal to any society: in a cosmpolitan ordering of society, differences are neither ranged in a hierarchy nor dissolved into universality, but are accepted. Debates between exponents of universalism and relativism, or between those of sameness and diversity, are generally conducted as either/or propositions. From the viewpoint of what I am calling realistic cosmopolitanism, these either/or debates are between false alternatives. We can get beyond them by reconsidering them as both/and propositions. Realistic cosmopolitanism should not be understood as in opposition to universalism, relativism, nationalism, and ethnicism, but as a summation or synthesis of those four. Contrary to their own proponents' usual understanding of them, these strategies for dealing with diversity do not exclude but actually presuppose one another; they are mutually correcting, limiting, and protecting. It is impossible to imagine a viable, realistic cosmopolitanism outside the context in which universalism and relativism, nationalism and ethnicism, are dominant strategies. What is new, what is realistic, about cosmopolitan realism derives from the reciprocal correction of these semantic elements, whose combination is greater than the parts.

Neither Huntington nor Fukuyama

Given its foundational respect for otherness, cosmopolitanism must differentiate itself from universalism and its totalizing impulses yet also look for ways of making difference universally acceptable. In itself, universalism is as heedless as it is indispensable. Returning to the either/or dispute at Valladolid, many have praised Las Casas's advanced thinking and criticized Sepúlveda's early racism. But what the two shared, from a cosmopolitan perspective, is no less interesting. Neither one could allow the Amerindians *both* their difference from *and* their sameness to Europeans. Las Casas and Sepúlveda equally assumed a universal axiology that sorts difference into superiority and inferiority. Even Las Casas accepted the sameness and equality of the Amerindians only because he thought them capable of acknowledging, and ready to acknowledge, the universal truth of Christianity—the barbarian can be baptized and join the body of Christ. Or, in Fukuyama's version, non-Western civilizations can be "modernized"—that is, attain the salvation of Western universalism through baptism in market economy and democracy.

A realistic cosmopolitanism would include what is excluded from these apparently opposite varieties of universalism: an affirmation of the other as both different and the same. It is time to leave behind, as anachronisms, both racism (of whatever type) and the apodictic, ethnocentric universalism of the West.

Postmodern Particularism vs. Realist Cosmopolitanism

Realistic cosmopolitanism cannot rest content to differentiate itself from the totalitarian features of universalism. If we are not to fall into the reverse trap of postmodern particularism, universalism cannot be abandoned. What the former involves is the strategy of making difference absolute and outside any binding normative framework. Combining the principle of homogeneity with the principle (borrowed from relativism) of the incommensurability of perspectives, the postmodern variety of particularism ultimately holds that dispositional criteria are impossible. By rejecting universalism altogether, postmodern cosmopolitanism is at risk of slipping into multicultural randomness. The danger is clear but the solution is not. How are we to put a limit on universalism that takes into account the arguments of contextualism and relativism? How can we affirm universal norms and at the same time ward off imperialism (in politics) and triumphalism (in religion)? One answer to this question would be that cosmopolitan norms should be defined not positively but negatively. A second plausible answer would entail procedural universalism. A third would consider the possibility of a contextual universalism.

The realism of realistic cosmopolitanism is expressed perhaps best by what it rejects: dictatorial standardization, violation of human dignity, and of course crimes against humanity such as genocide, slavery, and torture. Since cosmopolitanism respects the diversity of perspectives on any issue, cosmopolitans are sometimes thought incapable of decision and action. The reality test for cosmopolitanism is the existence of evils so great and obvious that there is virtually universal acknowledgment of the need to oppose them. To what extent does this negative definition establish common ground across frontiers? The most diverse kinds of cosmopolitanism can find a place under this negative roof, so long as they also accept the norm of procedural universalism, which holds that stated procedures and institutions are required for the regulation of conflict within transnational space. By such means, violent disputes are at best pacified but not consensually resolved—a problem that points to the ambivalences and dilemmas of "second modernity," which realistic cosmopolitanism is positioned to diagnose. *Cosmopolitanism* is thus not another word for *consensus*: managing conflict is a more realistic and cosmpolitan expectation. We need not the "ideal speech situation" of Jürgen Habermas, but rather a realistic theory about severe conflict among truths.

Negative and procedural universalisms make room for various "contextual universalisms."[6] Here, terms commonly understood to exclude one another link up in ways that may be mutually preserving and correcting. Thus, contextualism serves as a brake on the universalist cancellation of otherness, while universalism serves as a brake on the contextualist belief in the incomparability of perspectives. The result of this mutual tempering could be a "cosmopolitanism of humility" (in contrast to the pedagogical "cosmopolitanism of impatience" more in tune with Western attitudes).[7] Cultural relativists (often non-Western) and universalists (usually Western) tend to find themselves facing off during NGO debates and conferences, with the result that contextual universalist solutions tend to emerge. A good example is the Vienna human rights conference of 1993, when what I would call a contextual universalist alliance—actually, an alliance of African, Latin American, and Asian NGOs—actually transcended the opposition between hard-line universalists and cultural relativists. Extremely delicate problems were under discussion, including violence against women (marital violence and incest not excluded) and the extent to which violations of human-rights law can be a matter for UN intervention. The synthesis of contextualism and universalism that the alliance against domestic violence managed to develop was especially noteworthy in that it was directed against both Western arrogance and the expectations of the NGOs' own home governments. Women from the Islamic world combined a claim to universal human rights (the right to a secular education, notably) with the claim that they were first of all Muslims and wanted to continue thinking and acting as Muslims. Many women, even those who described themselves as secular, defended others who chose to wear headscarves and to embrace a conservative theology. This both/and approach is typical of the creativity that contextualist variants of universalism can release, and it justifies the hope that cosmopolitanism can resist degenerating into a "Eurocentric, 'rationalist,' secular-democratic jihad."[8]

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[6] See Beck, *What Is Globalization?* trans. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 81.

[7] Scott L. Malcomson, "The Varieties of Cosmopolitan Experience," in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

[8] Malcolmson, "Varieties of Cosmopolitan Experience," 237.

Scott Malcomson writes that, one hot Dakar afternoon, he happened to be in the U.S. embassy when a motley group was discussing human-rights issues. Experts flown in for the occasion spoke predictably about democracy and freedom of opinion while the assembled Senegalese listened in amiably. When their turn came to speak, a man in military uniform began by praising the unique character of Senegalese culture and gave polygamy as his illustration. But he undermined his position by giggling continually as he spoke, until it became obvious that he did not himself believe in his assertion. Everyone else, whether male or female, laughed as well. Other Senegalese contributions focused on the simple question of whether freedom from starvation is a universal right. The American experts had seen the question coming but could reply only, unpersuasively, No. The Senegalese pressed the issue, repeated the question, until all present broke into laughter. That universal rights do not protect every human being against death by starvation became suddenly a kind of joke. For the Senegalese, the defect was of white and Western origin. They did not attack the American experts but rather tried to help the Americans see more clearly, and did so with a generosity and humor that is best described as cosmopolitan.[9]

Cosmopolitanism, Ethnicity, and Nationalism

Cosmopolitanism and ethnicity, like universalism and contextualism, appear to be mutually exclusive but can in practice combine. A cosmopolitan ethnicity or ethnic cosmopolitanism would be directed against the universalist dissolution of otherness but also against any ontological definition of ethnicity. As Stuart Hall has shown in some detail, marginalized groups have been rediscovering their sometimes hidden, and sometimes suppressed, histories: there has been a "cultural self-empowerment of the marginal and the local."[10] No longer universalized out of existence or viewed as ontologically given, ethnic otherness is now, increasingly, historicized. Cosmopolitan realism thus relies upon a twofold negation: it negates both the universalist negation of ethnic difference and the essentialist stress upon it.

In the same way, it is inadequate to emphasize the opposition between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. For, as Edgar Grande says, "cosmopolitanism requires a certain degree of nationalism, which is the best and most reliable mechanism for the institutional production and stabilization of collective otherness. Where such stabilizers of difference are lacking, there is a danger that cosmopolitanism will veer off into substantive universalism."[11] Among the outstanding feats of nationalism is that, for every problem, it finds an excuse rather than a solution. Only a nationalism modified in the direction of cosmopolitanism can utilize the political potential for cooperation between countries and, in a context of interdependence, regain its capacity to solve, rather than elide, problems. A fusion of national and international strategies is necessary to check the potential for ethnic violence that globalization unleashes both internally and externally, and to do so without dismissing the otherness of others as merely a premodern prejudice.

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[9] Malcolmson, "Varieties of Cosmopolitan Experience," 242.

[10] Stuart Hall, "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity," in *Culture, Globalization, and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony D. King (Houndmills, U.K.: Macmillan, 1997), 19.

[11] Edgar Grande, "On *Reflexiver Kosmopolitismus*" (discussion paper, Munich, January 2003), 5.

Cosmopolitanism becomes more realistic and contextually grounded, more persuasive and seductive, as different modes of handling the otherness of others come to interact. The resultant fusion of these modes is such that the cosmopolitan impulse in each is strengthened, and the anticosmopolitan impulse weakened and finally curtailed.[12]

The Provocativeness of "Transnationality"

If, in the social handling of otherness, the strategies of nationalism and cosmopolitanism not only contradict but also complement and correct each other, then the opposition between "transnationality" and the national/international schema of social order must be called into question as well. The principle of the nation presupposes the principle of internationality. There are nations only in the plural: internationality makes nationality possible. The exclusivity and totality of the national/international order stands in opposition to a transnational/cosmopolitan conceptual order. Conational (and therefore nonnational) forms of living, thinking, and acting—forms that do not respect the boundaries between states—are transnational. Transnationality replaces the national *either/or* with a nonnational *both/and*.

Among numerous examples I could cite is the Hmong people, some 25 million strong, who preserve a transnational unity in China, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, the United States, Canada, Argentina, Australia, and France. For a Hmong symposium in the United States a few years ago ("towards a common future on cultural, economic, and educational issues" was the symposium's motto), the anthropologist Louisa Schein set herself the task of analyzing the scope for a transnational Hmong identity in the force field of rivalry between the United States and China. Not only did Schein's study not confirm the opposition one

[12] Apart from nationality, there is a need to clarify the relationship between religiosity and cosmopolitanism, but that clarification cannot be undertaken here. The new significance of belonging to a religious community cannot be adequately understood by reference to former circumstances, nor brushed aside as a mere reaction. Could it be that answers to the postmodern constellation are to be found within it? Or that it is an attempt to find a synthesis or connection which is both transnational and rooted in the particular universalism of "the Church"? Would the cosmopolitanization of religions then serve to uncouple the binding power of religiosity from historically generated affiliation to particular (ethnic) groups?

would expect between national and transnational interests; it concluded that the United States and China used the transnationality of this Asian diaspora culture to redefine their own nationalities. "I want to draw attention," Schein wrote, "to a pernicious zero-sum logic that portrays transnationalism and the 'nation-state' as mutually exclusive and as locked in competition for pragmatic primacy. Why, instead, can these debates not work toward imagining nation-state and transnational as interlocked, enmeshed, mutually constituting?"[13]

Schein's idea makes two further developments possible. First, we can imagine a world of transnational nationalism, where, if all goes well, a historicized ethnic identity may be simultaneously nationalized, internationalized, and opened up to cosmopolitanism by participating in venues that define themselves as mutually exclusive. Second, the uncoupling of state and nation raises the question of what constitutes statehood and what would make it possible for the concept of the state to acknowledge global interdependence and respond to its crises. What alternatives to the nation-state and its mystique are indicated by cosmopolitan realism? How should the idea of a transnational or cosmopolitan state be developed systematically?[14] Schein's study indicates that there are impulses in transnationalization that weaken and transcend the distinction between us and others, and that even transnationalize the sphere of state action. Both China and the United States gave considerable financial support to the Hmong symposium. Chinese officials regarded their contribution as part of their overall strategy of opening to the world market, while the United States was celebrating its own *internal* globalization—consolidating its global sphere of influence (in line with the subordinate phenomenon of Americanization) and at the same time transnationalizing the American dream by "Asianizing" it.

One example that can stand for many: there are now Hmong Boy Scouts. One speaker at the Hmong symposium in the United States stressed the exotic abilities of these scouts. "I work with a Hmong troop and an American troop," he told Schein:

> Parents of the American troop want to know what the Hmong secret is. They want to know how to raise such children, how to get them to work hard, be serious at school, listen to adults, be so polite. . . . Hmong scouting builds on what parents teach. . . . The last thing I have learned about Hmong scouting is that you must teach Hmong traditions. Many of the boys in the troop have grown up with Power Rangers, Michael Jackson, Michael Jordan. They want to learn about Hmong traditions. We invite their fathers now to teach about music and stories. We have

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13. Louisa Schein, "Importing Miao Brethren to Hmong America: A Not-So-Stateless Transnationalism," in Cheah and Robbins, *Cosmopolitics*, 169–70.

14. See Beck, *Macht und Gegenmacht im globalen Zeitalter: Neue weltpolitische Ökonomie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002).

> changed from teaching refugee kids about America to teaching American kids about Hmong tradition.[15]

Who is importing what from whom? Bearing in mind that Latinos are already more numerous than blacks in the U.S. population, can we not speak of an Asianization and Latin Americanization of the United States as well as an Americanization of Asia, Europe, and Latin America? Do a "transnational Asia" and a "transnational Latin America" perhaps have the same national-territorial definition of themselves as a white, Anglo-Saxon United States already destabilized and denationalized to its core?

New categories of fusion and interdependence are taking shape—hybrid forms for which the either/or logic of the national has no name, while the both/and logic of the transnational and cosmopolitan is still conceptually too underdeveloped. It would be a great mistake to think of the national/transnational distinction as an either/or alternative. Schein's study makes clear that, although the national and transnational paradigms of social order appear to contradict each other, they also complement and fuse with each other in many ways. Behind the facade of persistent nationality, processes of transnationalization are everywhere taking place; it is precisely the extension of power into the sphere of the transnational that makes it possible to define anew the national core behind the facade of nation-state continuity. These processes are all context-specific. And, so far from ruling it out, these processes actually assume a politics of neonational closure.

For instance, both India and Singapore are attempting to tie "their" transnationals to their respective national projects by delinking citizenship more and more from territorial presence. The Indian diaspora, stretching from Sydney to Silicon Valley, is linked to political and religious debates both in the countries of settlement and in India itself. For these "foreign native citizens," the Indian government has devised the legal category of "Indians not living in India"; and in order to encourage them to invest in India, the government associates this category with various property rights, tax benefits, and freedom to travel. Similar practices apply in Mexico, Singapore, Malaysia, and other countries. Yet such practices go hand in hand with strategies of political closure and reassertion of nationality. In Singapore, the financing of local NGOs by international NGOs and other organizations is forbidden, as is foreign participation in the national mass media. The national economy has been opened to transnational forces, including link-ups to transnational networks, at the same time that political participation and the public media have been closed to outside involvement. Cosmopolitan realism must develop its keen eye for this selective transnationalization, inclusion-cum-exclusion, simultaneous transnationalization, denationalization, and renationalization.

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[15] Schein, "Importing Miao Brethren," 183.

It is often asked to what extent deterritorialized ethnicity leads to a nationalism without frontiers. But the question poses a false alternative, since transnationalization means a balancing act between political loyalties, each of which presupposes multiple affiliations and plural nationalisms. The expansion of power associated with transnationalization makes possible both denationalization and renationalization, for the game of openness sets up a series of contradictions. If the state even partially uncouples citizenship status from territoriality, it undermines the principle of territorial sovereignty. The national framework is replaced with a transnational one, through which a reciprocal relation between rival states (for example, the United States and China) takes shape. Thus arises a new arena of conflict in which the various national projects combine with one another. Transnational identities and loyalties take shape and assert themselves in a contradictory relationship of opening and closure, denationalization and renationalization.[16]

Of course, these transnational and cosmopolitan complexities also significantly undermine the sense that ethnicities are natural and absolute (both at the national level and at the level of cultural identity). How can this effect be more precisely theorized? Koselleck suggests a distinction between symmetrical and asymmetrical opposites in the field of political action and political history. Among the former, he includes such general polarities as the friend/enemy relationship; and among the latter, oppositions such as those between Greek and barbarian, Christian and heathen, superhuman and subhuman, where the opposites are conceived as essentially unequal. The category of the transnational eludes both these conceptual oppositions—its irritating potential comes from its negating any such logic, any either/or. *Transnational* is not conceptually opposed to *indigenous*. Transnationals are local people (neighbors), though in some respects they are not locals (sometimes from their own point of view and, sometimes, from another, indigenous point of view). Generally speaking, the category of the transnational runs counter to (or cuts across) all concepts of social order. Hence the category is provocative, both politically and analytically.

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[16] See Bruno Riccio, "The Italian Construction of Immigration," *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 9.1 (2000): 53–74; Kevin Robins and Asu Aksoy, "From Spaces of Identity to Mental Spaces: Lessons from Turkish-Cypriot Cultural Experience in Britain," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27.4 (October 2001): 685–711; Ruba Salih, *Gender in Transnationalism: Home, Longing, and Belonging among Moroccan Migrant Women* (London: Routledge, 2003); Herbert Schiller, "Disney, Dallas, and Electronic Data Flows: The Transnationalization of Culture," in *Cultural Transfer or Electronic Imperialism? The Impact of American Television Programs on European Television*, ed. Christian W. Thomsen (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1989); Nina Glick-Schiller, "The Situation of Transnational Studies," *Identities* 4.2 (1997): 155–66; Levent Soysal, "Beyond the 'Second Generation': Rethinking the Place of Migrant Youth Culture in Berlin," in *Challenging Ethnic Citizenship: German and Israeli Perspectives on Immigration*, ed. Daniel Levy and Yfaat Weiss (New York: Berghahn, 2002).

In this sense, the category of the transnational sublates the distinctions between foreigner and native citizen, friend and enemy, alien and indigenous. It is no longer a question of aliens or enemies, native citizens or foreigners; there are now locals-cum-aliens and foreigners-cum-native citizens in large numbers. To put the point sharply, we might say that enemies are in a sense less threatening than transnationals, because enemies at least belong to the established order of "us" and "them" stereotypes. By contradicting this order, transnationals constantly point out that the world might be different from how it presently seems. Anyone hoping to clarify the category of the transnational must in any case reject the current forced equation of transnationals with foreigners, and therefore reject as well the expectations of "assimilation" and "integration" and the deprecatory judgments that these categories imply. Transnationality is a form of integration that makes the alien one's own, and the effect of this process is both worrying and enticing. The result for national policy would be immigration laws no longer tied entirely, or even at all, to the objective of integration.

By this point it should be clear how little transnationality and cosmopolitan realism have to do with the concept and attitude of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism shies away from the complexity and ambivalence that I have been describing. It should also be clear that cosmopolitanism is an age-old concept and attitude, since the phenomenon of mingling (usually compulsory) across frontiers is an age-old phenomenon. What makes cosmopolitan "new" at our historical juncture is its reflexivity.

A Critique of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism locates respect for cultural difference within the nation-state, and that strategy for dealing with otherness results in a contradiction. National homogeneity is both required and, at the same time, opposed.[17] Multiculturalism is trapped in the epistemology of nationhood, with its either/or categories (national/international, most crucially) and its tendency toward essentialist definitions of identity. The diversity that multiculturalism celebrates is a diversity among identities lacking in ambivalence, complexity, or contingency. Someone has said that multiculturalism is a highly refined variant on the idea that cats, mice, and dogs eat from the same bowl: it postulates, in other words, essentialist identities and a rivalry among them. The strategy of multiculturalism presupposes collective categories of otherness and orients itself toward homogeneous groups conceived as either similar to or different from one another, but in either case separate. Multiculturalism amounts to national multinationalism.

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[17] See Ulf Hedetoft, *The Global Turn* (Aalborg, Denmark: Aalborg University Press, 2003), 159.

Duplicating nationalism *internally*, multiculturalism views groups that the nation would assimilate as nationalities themselves. A view of this kind is necessarily opposed to processes of individualization. For multiculturalists, individuals are epiphenomenal, conceived as members of territorial, ethnic, and political units, which then engage in "dialogue" with one another "across frontiers."

The social predetermination of the individual that marks classical sociology is broken down and transcended only by cosmopolitanism, where the claims of different identities do not define individuals but set them conflictually free, *compelled to forge links in order to survive*. The resources that individuals have for this work are, doubtless, comprehensively uneven.

Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism

"It is therefore apparent," Edgar Grande argues,

> that cosmopolitanism must not only integrate different substantive norms and principles, but also integrate and balance different modes and principles of the social handling of otherness. It cannot simply supplant other principles of modernity; it must recognize and preserve them. I would therefore maintain that, if cosmopolitanism is to have a lasting effect, it must become reflexive and be conceptualized together with its own conditions of possibility. Cosmopolitanism must therefore achieve the meta-integration of principles of modernity. I would describe this as reflexive cosmopolitanism. It is thus not least the "regulative principle" with whose help the combined action of universalist, nationalist, and cosmopolitan norms must be regulated in the second modernity. Whether or not this can succeed, and in which conditions, should be one of the key questions to ask.[18]

Reality is becoming cosmopolitan, surely, but how does the cosmopolitanization of reality become *conscious*? What conditions hinder or favor a collective awareness of actually existing cosmopolitanism? To what extent might the present article be an element in the process of becoming aware?

To discuss these questions properly, it is essential to appreciate that in world history the mingling of boundaries and cultures is not the exception but the rule.[19] The separate worlds or spaces claimed by territorial nationalism and ethnicism are historically unreal. If we look back to the great migrations, we might stretch a point and say that there are no indigenous peoples. Every native began as an alien who drove the prior natives out, then claimed a natural right to self-

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18. Grande, "On *Reflexiver Kosmopolitismus*," 5.

19. See McNeill, *Polyethnicity and National Unity*, and Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

protection against the next wave of intruders. If contiguous cultures and religions (Islamic, Christian, and Jewish, for example) interpenetrate at their origins and are hard to distinguish, then questions need to be asked about the historical process of separating and "essentializing" them. How is it possible, first, that the historical norm of intermingling has been falsely portrayed as the exception (or even completely driven out of our historical consciousness), whereas the exception to the rule—the ideal of national, cultural, or religious homogeneity—has been held up as an eternal reality? Second: what conditions contributed to the turn away from belief in that eternal reality by the national orthodoxies of the second half of the twentieth century? What conditions favor a growing awareness of the largely unconscious and unobserved cosmopolitanization of reality? The focus of this first question is the history and historiography of nationalism, and exploring it is not strictly relevant to my purposes here. But the second question points toward the distinction between what I call first and second modernity, and I would like to respond, however briefly, to that question in conclusion.

The rise of a realistic, politically effective cosmopolitanism (discernible in institutions such as the United Nations, European Union, International Criminal Court, World Bank, NATO, OECD, and so forth), should be understood as a truly unintended consequence of Hitler and of Germany's rage for racial purity, with all its ravages—moral, political, and psychological. Auschwitz was among the most traumatic experiences of Western civilization. "Never again"—the orientation toward inalienable human rights—is by now a basic moral principle both of the new Europe and of the global political order.[20] This new orientation has tended to discredit axioms of thought about the nation-state. All attempts to propagate and practice the ideal of ethnic unity within existing states conjure up memories of Nazi terror, and the assimilation of ethnic minorities has also become a politically dubious notion. Were not Jews who thought of themselves as German systematically murdered along with the less assimilated? The question for all minorities, then, is whether to assert their difference and strengthen it both internally and externally in the form of transnational networks and identities. A cosmopolitan common sense is taking shape that not only authorizes but demands a break with the principle of national sovereignty, because genocides are not internal affairs of nation-states but crimes against humanity whose defeat or prevention is not the responsibility of individual states.

Another element in the rise of cosmopolitanism has been the postcolonial movement.[21] First to be discarded was the myth that the internal, unintended, forced cosmopolitanization of Western societies and cities in the second half of the twentieth century constituted a historical novelty. The experience of transculturation undergone by colonial peoples belongs not only to the external but also to the internal history of Europe's imperial states. As Stuart Hall writes:

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[20] See Beck, Daniel Levy, and Natan Sznaider, "Erinnerung und Vergebung in der Zweiten Moderne," in *Entgrenzung und Entscheidung: Was ist neu an der Theorie reflexiver Modernisierung?* ed. Beck and Christoph U. Lau (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), esp. "Kosmopolitisches Europa."

[21] See Hall, "When Was 'the Post-colonial'? Thinking at the Limit," in *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London: Routledge, 1996).

> Hybridity, syncretism, multidimensional temporalities, the double inscriptions of colonial and metropolitan times, the two-way cultural traffic characteristic of the contact zones of the cities of the "colonized" long before they have become the characteristic tropes of the cities of the "colonizing," the forms of translation and transculturation which have characterized the "colonial relation" from its earliest stages, the disavowals and in-betweens, the here-and-theres, mark the *aporias* and redoublings whose interstices colonial discourses have always negotiated.[22]

The discourse of postcolonialism has effectively disrupted our political and cultural forgetfulness. Very diverse transnational political movements, in which minorities have developed a life and self-understanding of their own, have blocked every way back to closed, ethnically centered historiography. No one can stake a special claim or right to understand how cultural practices originate; and terms such as *diaspora*, *cultural mélange*, and *hybridity* are emerging from their dark derogation to speak an infectious truth about the human condition. The experiences of being foreign or living-between, of social isolation, ambivalence, and rootlessness: these all have lost much of their apocalyptic ring. The question mark has become a form of existence with positive connotations for many.

The term *diaspora* in particular has exposed the lack of clear-cut analytical norms, while at the same time its widened use has contributed positively to our understanding of terms like *equality* and *solidarity*. Flirting with whatever is "uprooted" or "alienated" in the national either/or, the concept of diaspora has nursed a well-hidden unease about the thoughtless and reckless overintegration of culture and society. Use of the term combines an interest in the preservation of particularity, however diffused geographically, with a knowledge that particularity can survive only if human rights, rising above fatherlands, are universally affirmed and make the whole planet livable for all. The question "who am I?" is now irrevocably separated from origins and essences, but there are answers with greater and lesser potential for authenticity. The term *diaspora* has by its wide use become inflated—in cultural studies, of course, though also in the ways in which minorities everywhere understand themselves and their actions. But the inflation does not so much demonstrate that the concept is losing force as it shows the extent to which a both/and consciousness is emerging in the self-understanding of individuals, groups, publics, movements, and ultimately even religions.

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[22] Hall, "When Was 'the Post-colonial'?" 251.

WHOSE COSMOS, WHICH COSMOPOLITICS?

Comments on the Peace Terms of Ulrich Beck

Bruno Latour

Blessed are the peacemakers. It is always nicer to read a peace proposal (like Ulrich Beck's) than a call for jihad (like Samuel Huntington's). Beck's robust and realist form of cosmopolitanism, expressed in the lead article of this symposium, is to be welcomed. On the other hand, peace proposals make sense only if the real extent of the conflicts they are supposed to settle is understood. A detached and, let us say, inexpensive way of understanding enmity, a Wilsonian indifference to its complexity, may further infuriate the parties to a violent dispute. The problem with Beck's solution is that, if world wars were about issues of universality and particularity, as he makes them out to be, then world peace would have ensued long ago. The limitation of Beck's approach is that his "cosmopolitics" entails no cosmos and hence no politics either. I am a great admirer of Beck's sociology—the only far-reaching one Europe has to offer—and have said so in print on several occasions. What we have here is an argument among friends working together on a puzzle that has defeated, so far, everyone everywhere.

Let me make clear from the beginning that I am not debating the usefulness of a cosmopolitan *social science* that, beyond the boundaries of nation-states, would try to look at global phenomena using new types of statistics and inquiries. I accept this point all the more readily since for me, *society* has never been the equivalent of *nation-state*. For two reasons: the first is that the scientific networks

Common Knowledge 10:3

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that I have spent some time describing have never been limited to national boundaries anyway: *global* is largely, like the globe itself, an invention of science. The second reason is that, as disciples of Gabriel Tarde know very well, *society* has always meant *association* and has never been limited to humans. So I have always been perfectly happy to speak, like Alphonse de Candolle, of "plant sociology" or, like Alfred North Whitehead, of "stellar societies."[1] It should also be clear that I don't take the expression "peace proposal" ironically. On the contrary, it's for me crucial to imagine another role for social science than that of a distant observer watching disinterestedly. Beck is struggling for a mixture of research and normative intervention, and this is exactly what I mean by the new *diplomatic* role of the social scientist. What is in question between us is the extent to which we are ready to absorb dissents not only about the identity of humans but also about the cosmos they live in.

A historical anecdote, retold in a major paper by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, may illustrate why Beck's suggested approach to peacemaking is not completely up to the task.[2] The main example that Beck gives is the "Valladolid controversy," the famous *disputatio* that Spaniards held to decide whether or not Indians had souls susceptible of being saved. But while that debate was under way, the Indians were engaged in a no less important one, though conducted with very different theories in mind and very different experimental tools.[3] Their task, as Viveiros de Castro describes it, was not to decide if Spaniards had souls—that much seemed obvious—but rather if the conquistadors had *bodies*. The theory under which Amerindians were operating was that all entities share by default the same fundamental organization, which is basically that of humans. A licuri palm, a peccary, a piranha, a macaw: each has a soul, a language, and a family life modeled on the pattern of a human (Amerindian) village. Entities all have souls and their souls are all the same. What makes them differ is that their bodies differ, and it is bodies that give souls their contradictory perspectives: the perspective of the licuri palm, the peccary, the piranha, the macaw. Entities all have the same *culture* but do not acknowledge, do not perceive, do not live in, the same *nature*. For the controversialists at Valladolid, the opposite was the case but they remained blissfully unaware that there *was* an opposite side. Indians obviously had bodies like those of Europeans, but did they have the same spirit? Each side conducted an experiment, based on its own premises and procedures: on the one side to determine whether Indians have souls, and on the other side to determine whether Europeans have bodies. The Amerindians' experiment was as scientific as the Europeans'. Conquistador prisoners were taken as guinea pigs and immersed in water to see, first, if they drowned and, second, if their flesh would eventually rot. This experiment was as crucial for the Amerindians as the Valladolid dispute was for the Iberians. If the conquerors drowned and rotted, then the question was settled; they had bodies. But if they did not drown and rot, then the conquerors had to be purely spiritual entities, perhaps similar to shamans. As Claude Lévi-Strauss summarized, somewhat ironically, the two experiments, the Spaniards' versus the Amerindians': "the whites were invoking the social sciences while the Indians had more confidence in the natural ones."

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[1] The first book that tried to describe scientific networks quantitatively was written by a plant sociologist and took the point of view of cosmopolitan methodology. See Alphonse de Candolle, *Histoire des sciences et des savants depuis deux siècles d'après l'opinion des principales académies ou sociétés scientifiques* (1873; Paris: Fayard, 1987).

[2] Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Les pronoms cosmologiques et le perspectivisme amérindien," in *Gille Deleuze: Une vie philosophique*, ed. Eric Alliez (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1998), 429–62 (see also his essay in this symposium).

[3] It is not clear whether the two main characters of the controversy, as retold by Beck, ever met. See Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). There is a fairly bad book where the two protagonists meet (and the film is even worse): Jean-Claude Carrière, *La Controverse de Valladolid* (Paris: Le Pré aux clercs, 1992). The dispute over whether Spaniards have bodies is documented by Claude Lévi-Strauss, who retells an episode from Oviedo's *Historia* (supposed to have taken place earlier in Puerto Rico). The famous passage from *Tristes tropiques* (Paris: Plon, 1955), 82–83, is as follows: "Au même moment d'ailleurs, et dans une île voisine (Porto Rico, selon le témoignage d'Ovideo) les Indiens s'employaient à capturer les blancs et à les faire périr par immersion, puis montaient pendant des semaines la garde autour des noyés afin de savoir s'ils étaient ou non soumis à la putréfaction. De cette comparaison entre les enquêtes se dégagent deux conclusions: les blancs invoquaient les sciences sociales alors que les Indiens avaient plutôt confiance dans les sciences naturelles; et, tandis que les blancs proclamaient que les Indiens étaient des bêtes, les seconds se contentaient de soupçonner les premiers d'être des dieux. A ignorance égale, le dernier procédé était certes plus digne d'hommes." But, as Viveiros de Castro has shown, making a decisive improvement on Lévi-Strauss's interpretation, the point was not to check whether the conquerors were gods but simply whether they had bodies.

The relevance of this anecdote should be apparent: at no point in the Valladolid controversy did the protagonists consider, even in passing, that the confrontation of European Christians and Amerindian animists might be framed differently from the way in which Christian clerics understood it in the sixteenth century. At no point were the Amerindians asked what issue they took to be in dispute, nor is Beck asking now. But asking that question is only the first step en route to adequate complexity. Was every European in agreement with every other? Were there not two (at least) solutions to the problem raised at Valladolid? Indians had souls like Christians or else Indians did not—each position had its partisans. Beck supposes there were only two solutions to the problem posed at Valladolid about Indian souls (they have souls, they do not have souls) and he ignores the other problem raised in South America about conquistador bodies (they have bodies, they do not have bodies). A negotiation between Europeans and Amerindians would thus be, at a minimum, *four*-sided. Bartolomé de Las Casas, the Dominican priest, held that Europeans and Amerindians were basically the same, and he complained of the un-Christian cruelty of Christians against their "Indian brothers." But how would he have responded, how might his views have modified, had he witnessed the systematic drowning of his fellow Spaniards in a scientific experiment designed to assay their exact degree of bodily presence? Which "side" would Las Casas, after the experience, be on? As

Viveiros de Castro has persuasively shown, the question of "the other," so central to recent theory and scholarship, has been framed with inadequate sophistication. There are more ways to be other, and vastly more others, than the most tolerant soul alive can conceive.

How cosmopolitan is a negotiator who mediates on behalf of one or two of the four (or more) sides to a dispute? It is hazardous, and perhaps ethnocentric as well, to assume that enemies agree on baseline principles (the principle, for instance, that all humans have bodies).[4] I say that Beck's stance may be ethnocentric because his cosmopolitanism is a gentler case of European philosophical internationalism. Beck takes his key term and its definition, off the shelf, from the Stoics and Kant. Those definitions (Beck's, Kant's, the Stoics') are problematic: none shows understanding that more than culture is put in jeopardy by conflicts. The cosmos too may be at stake. Like most sociologists, Beck suffers from anthropology blindness. For the sociologist, nature, the world, the cosmos, is simply there; and since humans share basic characteristics, our view of the world is, at baseline, the same everywhere. Perversity, acquisitiveness, undisciplined instincts account for the fact that we do not—we rarely have—peace. When Beck writes that Las Casas was in a state of denial over the extent of the struggle he wished devoutly to end, Beck without realizing it is speaking of himself as well. Beck and Las Casas are good guys, but good intentions do not resolve or prevent strife. I am not saying of course that Beck's cosmopolitanism is simply a larger version of Jürgen Habermas's humanism. The entrance to the debating room is not limited, for Beck, to rational agents able to pursue a reasonable conversation. Beck is ready to deal with much wider conflicts. What he does not realize, however, is that whenever cosmopolitanism has been tried out, from Alexandria to the United Nations, it has been during the great periods of complete confidence in the ability of reason and, later, science to know *the one* cosmos whose existence and solid certainty could then prop up all efforts to build the world metropolis of which we are all too happy to be citizens. The problem we face now is that it's precisely this "one cosmos," what I call *mononaturalism*, that has disappeared. It's impossible for us now to inherit the beautiful idea of cosmopolitanism since what we lack is just what our prestigious ancestors possessed: a cosmos. Hence we have to choose, in my view, between cosmopolitanism and cosmo*politics*.

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[4] There is of course a great difference between the "cosmopolitan" project of an international civil society and what I am discussing here. The difference, as was made clear in a meeting organized by Ulrich Beck at the London School of Economics in February 2004, is the weight given to the word *cosmos*. "Citizens of the world" are cosmopolitan, to be sure, but that does not mean that they have even begun to fathom the difficulties of a politics of the cosmos. See, for instance, Étienne Tassin, *Un monde commun: Pour une cosmo-politique des conflits* (Paris: Seuil, 2003), and Daniele Archibugi, ed., *Debating Cosmopolitics*, New Left Review Debates (London: Verso, 2003). I thank the participants at the meeting for useful insights into these rather incommensurable political philosophies.

One way to present this argument is to contrast Beck's use of the term *cosmopolitan* with that of Isabelle Stengers in her multivolume masterpiece *Cosmopolitique*.[5] A Stoic or a Kantian will call cosmopolitan anyone who is a "citizen of the cosmos" rather than (or before he or she is) a citizen of a particular state, an adherent of a particular religion, a member of a particular guild, profession, or family. Stengers intends her use of *cosmopolitics* to alter what it means "to belong" or "to pertain." She has reinvented the word by representing it as a composite of the strongest meaning of *cosmos* and the strongest meaning of *politics* precisely because the usual meaning of the word *cosmopolite* supposed a certain theory of science that is now disputed.[6] For her, the strength of one element checks any dulling in the strength of the other. The presence of *cosmos* in *cosmopolitics* resists the tendency of *politics* to mean the give-and-take in an exclusive human club. The presence of *politics* in *cosmopolitics* resists the tendency of *cosmos* to mean a finite list of entities that must be taken into account. *Cosmos* protects against the premature closure of *politics*, and *politics* against the premature closure of *cosmos*. For the Stoics, cosmopolitanism was a proof of tolerance; cosmopolitics, in Stengers's definition, is a cure for what she calls "the malady of tolerance."[7]

The contrast between Stengers's understanding of *cosmos* and Beck's could not be more stark. For Beck, the word means culture, worldview, any horizon wider than that of a nation-state. He assumes that issues of war and peace involve only humans, each endowed with the same psychology, each knowing a language translatable into every other language, and each possessed of only slightly contradictory representations of what-there-is. For Beck, as for most sociologists and all political scientists, wars rage because human cultures have (and defend) differing views of the same world. If those views could be reconciled or shown to differ only superficially, peace would follow automatically. This way of understanding *cosmos* and *cosmopolitics* is limited in that it puts a limit to the number of entities on the negotiating table. But if *cosmos* is to mean anything, it must embrace, literally, everything—including all the vast numbers of nonhuman entities making humans act. William James's synonym for *cosmos* was *pluriverse*, a coinage that makes its awesome multiplicity clear. In the face of which, Beck's calm, untaxed coherence would be unjustifiable except that he presumes that almost all the complexities of the pluriverse are out of bounds for politics, or, at any rate, that they make no difference in the way we agree or disagree with one another. Peace, for

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[5] Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitiques*, vol. 1, *La guerre des sciences* (Paris: La Découverte; Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1996).

[6] For Stengers as well as for me, the ability to imagine a political order is always directly predicated on a certain definition of science. The link was made forcefully by science studies. See the now classic work of Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985). The main weakness of legal and humanitarian forms of cosmopolitanism is to forget entirely the theory of science that has been surreptitiously used to assemble the cosmos in a peaceful manner but without due process.

[7] Stengers, *Cosmopolitiques*, vol. 7, *Pour en finir avec la tolérance* (Paris: La Découverte; Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1997).

Beck's kind of mononaturalism, is possible because our disputes (to borrow the Scholastic terms) bear upon secondary, rather than primary, qualities.

If this be peace, I must say I prefer war. By war I mean a conflict for which there is no agreed-upon arbiter, a conflict in which what is at stake is precisely what is *common* in the common world to be built. As is well known from Carl Schmitt's definition, any conflict, no matter how bitter, that is waged under a common arbiter is not a war but what he calls a "police operation." If there exists one cosmos, already unified, one nature that is used as the arbiter for all our disputes, then there are, by definition, no wars but only police operations. To use Schmitt again: Westerners have not understood themselves as facing on the battlefield an enemy whose victory is possible, just irrational people who have to be corrected. As I have argued elsewhere, Westerners have until now been engaged in *pedagogical wars*.[8] But things have changed of late and our wars are now wars of the worlds, because it's now the makeup of the cosmos that is at stake. Nothing is off limits, off the table, for dispute. The Amerindians, it is worth recalling, did not rejoice when their side—those Europeans who thought them fully human—triumphed at Valladolid. Yet those ungrateful Indians received the gift of a soul that permitted their baptism and thus salvation. Why did the European offer of both peace and eternal life not please them? The Europeans took European cosmopolitics for granted as *natural*, and nature is a means to shortcut politics before peace is authentically attainable.[9] The settlements that nature offers are reached without due process—they put 99 percent of what is up for grabs off limits, and the result is always another round of conflict. Politics is moot if it is not about (what John Tresch calls) "cosmograms."[10] We perhaps never differ about opinions, but rather always about things—about what world we inhabit. And very probably, it never happens that adversaries come to agree on opinions: they begin, rather, to inhabit a different world.

A common world is not something we come to recognize, as though it had always been here (and we had not until now noticed it). A common world, if there is going to be one, is something we will have to build, tooth and nail, together. The ethnocentrism of sociologists is never clearer than when they paper over the threat of multiple worlds with their weak notion of cosmopolitanism.[11] In Beck's article here, the telltale symptom is his offhand footnote about religion. There have been good historical reasons—as Olivier Christin has shown, with respect to sixteenth-century warfare in Europe—to sequester religion when peace proposals are advanced.[12] But it is not clear that what was right four and a half centuries ago is a diplomatic and respectful way to handle our newly generated wars of religion. When men of good will assemble with their cigars in the Habermas Club to discuss an armistice for this or that conflict and they leave their gods on hooks in the cloakroom, I suspect that what is under way is not a peace conference at all. There are Versailles that beget Munichs that beget Apocalypse. How is it that Beck believes religion is ignorable? Again, there is no cosmos in his cosmopolitanism: he seems to have no inkling that humans have always counted less than the vast population of divinities and lesser transcendental entities that give us life. For most people, in most places, during most eons, humans have "owners," to use Tobie Nathan's term; and those proprietors take precedence over humans at whatever cost. Beck appears to believe in a UNESCO koine, a sociological Esperanto, that lies hidden behind stubborn defects, whether social or psychological, in our representations. Men of good will, he would say, must agree that gods are no more than representations. It would be pretty to think so; but, as Nathan makes vivid in his contribution to this symposium, it is not humans who are at war but gods. Or, at least, we should entertain the possibility that enemies can be separated by disagreements *that wide*. Peace settlements are not, as Stengers emphasizes, between men of good will who have left their gods (their narrow attachments) behind but between men of ill will possessed by super- and subhumans of ill will. A settlement reached too soon is, realistically, a grave danger. Stengers might even add that the longer it takes to reach agreement, the better (hence her daring to utter the phrase "malady of tolerance"). Even Cromwell, after all, while promoting the most horrendous acts of iconoclasm, had the scruple to exclaim (in a sentence Stengers never tires of quoting): "I beseech ye, my brethren, in the bowels of Christ, think that ye may be mistaken!" Where, in Beck's view, is the place for such a tragic warning? His cosmopolitics is much too cosmo*polite* to handle the horrors of our time.

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[8] This point is developed at some length in Bruno Latour, *War of the Worlds: What about Peace?* trans. Charlotte Bigg (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2002). Beck's position in the paper I am discussing is all the more strange since he has never tired, in his other books, of showing why science and technology can no longer deliver the sort of mastery on which a quiet and sane political reason could then be propped up. For some strange reason, he seems to have forgotten his own lessons.

[9] Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[10] John Tresch, "Mechanical Romanticism: Engineers of the Artificial Paradise" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2001).

[11] To counter that ethnocentrism is why Viveiros de Castro (see n. 2 herein) launched his monster term *multinaturalism*. The difference between multinaturalism and multiculturalism is that truth and reality are engaged in the former and never in the latter.

But perhaps the problem is simply that Beck explores only one dimension of peacemaking—the traditional gradient that leads from particular to universal and back again. Approaching peace in this way is a venerable Stoic tradition; and, as its latest expositor, Beck develops a nice compromise between the cheap universalisms available now and some even cheaper varieties of relativism and multiculturalism. Still, the traditional gradient and the Stoic view of it are not all there is to achieving peace: attachments are not defined solely by their expansion and shrinkage along a line between universalism and particularism. We should perhaps explore another dimension, perpendicular to the first—a gradient running from "naturalism" to "constructivism." If it's true that the traditional meaning of cosmopolitanism was based on a certain definition of science, it makes sense to see how it has been modified when another definition of science is called for. Cosmopolitans may dream of the time when citizens of the world come to recognize that they all inhabit the same world, but cosmopolitics are up against a somewhat more daunting task: to see how this "same world" can be slowly *composed*.

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[12] Olivier Christin, *La Paix de religion: L'autonomisation de la raison politique au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1997).

Confronted by a given cosmogram, the Stoic wants to know whether it is expressive more of attachment or of detachment (whether it is local or universal in character). But a more urgent and polemical question to ask enemies might be: "How do you differentiate between good and bad attachments?" For the Stoic, detachment is emancipation (and attachment is slavery). By definition a citizen of the cosmos is free; an Egyptian, Greek, or Jew is attached (enslaved) to his or her locale and local knowledge. To be Egyptian, Greek, or Jewish is—in the Stoic tradition—a stigma. "Humanity" was a great and welcome discovery and has been a great and welcome rediscovery each time that (after World War II, notably) it has come to prominence. And yet, if all the United Nations members were satisfied to be "just humans," if the UNESCO lingua franca was enough to define all inhabitants of the planet, peace would already reign. Since there is no peace, there must be something wrong with this humanistic definition of an emancipated human as the only acceptable member of the Club.

We face a situation in which, on the one hand, real peace is unattainable if negotiators leave their gods, attachments, and incompatible cosmos outside the conference room. On the other hand, a freight of gods, attachments, and unruly cosmos make it hard to get through the door into any common space. Moreover, humans with owners, attachments, and a cosmos (crammed with entities ignored or ridiculed by other humans) tend not to seek new memberships in clubs. They have reason to believe that they themselves belong to the best clubs already and cannot fathom why others—when invited—have refused to join.[13] Hence the need for a second dimension to peacemaking, one that does not require detachment from the beings (for instance, divinities) that make us exist. This second dimension requires another protocol, another investigation, to answer another question: *Through what sort of test do you render possible the distinction between good*

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[13] This attitude pertains, according to Philippe Descola and Viveiros de Castro, to all animists—as opposed to totemists, naturalists, and analogists. (I am using here the vocabulary developed by Descola in his essay "Constructing Natures: Symbolic Ecology and Social Practice," in *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Descola and Gísli Pálsson [London: Routledge, 1996], 82–102.) According to Viveiros de Castro (in comments on my paper), Amazonian Indians are already globalized in the sense that they have no difficulty in integrating "us" into "their" cosmologies. It is simply that in their cosmic politics we do not have the place that "we" think we deserve; it is not the case that "we" are global and "they" are local.

and bad attachments? Making those distinctions necessitates, first, the abandonment of naturalism, which is the faith in a single natural world, comprehensible through Science — or rather, through a mistaken definition of (Western) natural science whose purpose has been to eliminate entities from the pluriverse. The universal embrace of naturalism has been, for moderns, the royal road to peace. And yet naturalism has also been the grounds on which the West has waged its pedagogical wars. The modern West scolds the remainder of mankind: *we all live under the same biological and physical laws and have the same fundamental biological, social, and psychological makeup. This, you have not understood because you are prisoners of your superficial worldviews, which are but representations of the reality to which we, through science, have privileged access. But science is not our property; it belongs to mankind universally! Here, partake — and with us you will be one*. The problem with this opening gambit into diplomacy is not, I rush to add, that the argument is wrong.[14] The argument is right, but it puts the cart before the horse; it begins where it should, eventually (very eventually), end. It is possible — and from a Western (from my Burgundian) point of view, desirable — that, in the distant future, we come to live within a common world defined as naturalism defines it. But to behave as if the settlement were already in place and as though it requires no negotiation to achieve it is a sure trigger to further warfare.

The assumptions of naturalism have been shown — most recently and thoroughly by Philippe Descola — to be unshared by vast numbers of humans.[15] But constructivism, despite its reputation as a radical postmodern ideology, might be more universalizable since the distinction between what is well and badly made is more than widespread. *Constructivism* is a tricky word, no doubt.[16] But we can likely agree that constructivists tend to share these principles:

- the realities to which humans are attached are dependent on series of mediations;
- those realities and their mediations are composed of heterogeneous ingredients and have histories;

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[14] There is a large difference between "the sciences" understood as the proliferation of entities with which to build the collective and "Science" as a way to eliminate secondary qualities because of the postulation of primary ones. Each requires a different politics. On this distinction, see my *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). Contrary to what naturalists believe, there is little in the sciences that authorizes scientists to be eliminativists. This point is made especially well by Stengers in the brilliant book *Penser avec Whitehead: Une libre et sauvage création de concepts* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

[15] See, e.g., Descola, *La Nature domestique: Symbolisme et praxis dans l'écologie des Achuar* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1986), translated into English by Nora Scott as *In the Society of Nature: A Native Ecology in Amazonia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[16] See more on this subject in Latour, "The Promises of Constructivism," in *Chasing Technoscience: Matrix for Materiality*, ed. Don Ihde and Evan Selinger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 27–46.

- the amount of heterogeneous ingredients and the number of mediations necessary to sustain realities are a credit to their reality (the more mediated, the more real);
- our realities are open to differing interpretations that must be considered with caution;
- if a reality has extension (in space and time), its complex life-support systems must have been extended also;
- realities can fail and thus require careful maintenance and constant repair.

The paramount example of constructivism, on this definition, is the work of the sciences, as I have shown numerous times.[17] In the sciences, the degree of objectivity and certainty is directly proportional to the extent of artificiality, layering, heterogeneity, multiplicity, and complexity of mediations. The assertion sounds radical but is merely obvious: in a laboratory, no naked access to truth is thinkable. Is a microbe visible without the mediation of a microscope? Are microscopes found in nature or are they human fabrications? When one scientist questions another, it is not to ask whether new data (new facts) have been fabricated or not. The question is, "How have you proven that *x* is so?"—and the emphasis is on *how*, by what *means* or mediation. The difference that counts, when scientists meet in confidence, is not the one between fact and construction but the one between good and bad facts. Things are different when scientists meet the *vulgum pecus*: then (and only then) do they borrow arguments from the epistemologists and join with philosophers in playing pedagogical war games, where the Red relativists have to fight the White Knights of realism.

The example of the sciences should make clear that *constructed* and *real* are not opposed terms and that the operative question is how to distinguish between good constructions and bad. If these two generalizations apply to the sciences, to which epistemologists have assigned so unique and transcendent a role, then surely my generalizations apply to the harsh realities of cosmopolitics. And it appears, indeed, that there is no extant or extinct way of life that has not been passionately involved in making distinctions between good and bad fabrications. This observation has its uses in pursuit of peace. A constructivist landing at the mouth of the Amazon (where Amerindians, recall, were drowning Spaniards to test if they had bodies) could have entered into conversations unimaginable to the clerics at Valladolid. "Ah," a Spanish constructivist could have said to an Amazonian researcher, "this is how you decide matters? How horrifying. Let me suggest another way to formulate and test the question at issue." Of course, this peaceful encounter is fantastic but not for the reason that a naturalist would presume. The encounter would not happen as I have described it only because of the fundamentalism of the parties involved.

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[17] In *Common Knowledge* alone, I have defended variations on this argument in four articles and two dialogues: "On Technical Mediation—Philosophy, Sociology, Genealogy," *Common Knowledge* 3.2 (fall 1994): 29–64; "The 'Pédofil' of Boa Vista: A Photo-Philosophical Montage," *Common Knowledge* 4.1 (spring 1995): 144–87; "Do Scientific Objects Have a History? Pasteur and Whitehead in a Bath of Lactic Acid," *Common Knowledge* 5.1 (spring 1996): 76–91; "Trains of Thought: Piaget, Formalism, and the Fifth Dimension," *Common Knowledge* 6.3 (winter 1997): 170–91; "Two Writers Face One Turing Test: A Dialogue in Honor of HAL" (with Richard Powers), *Common Knowledge* 7.1 (spring 1998): 177–91; and "The Science Wars—A Dialogue," *Common Knowledge* 8.1 (winter 2002): 71–79.

Fundamentalism is at the far end of our options from constructivism. A fundamentalist—in science, politics, or religion—would review the list I gave above and indignantly invert every assertion on it:

- the realities to which humans are attached are, quite simply, unmediated;
- those realities are unitary (not composed of heterogeneous ingredients) and have no history per se;
- the amount of heterogeneous ingredients and the number of mediations necessary to sustain a state of affairs must be debited from its degree of reality (the less mediation, the more real);
- realities are not open to interpretation;
- realities of course have extension (in space and time)—they are by nature universal and it is absurd to say that they require "life support";
- realities are not susceptible to failure and thus do not require maintenance or repair of any kind.

Realities of this description are invoked in the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* as much as in the dark caves of Pakistan, and they can even come from human-rights activists: anyone who holds that *fabricated* means *untrue*, and *made* means *fake*, tends toward fundamentalism. Common experience in science, art, love, and religion should prompt us to say, "the more carefully fabricated, the more real and long-lasting." Why we do not tend to reach that more sensible conclusion is perhaps our old and continuing fear of idolatry, of worshiping what human hands have made; a genuine acceptance of constructivism requires a reassessment of the whole history of iconoclasm and critique.[18]

The delightful irony of the matter is that, while fundamentalism was homemade, made in the West—the former West—it has by now become *la chose du monde la mieux distribuée*. As Peter Sloterdijk has remarked, Westerners loved globalization until *les autres* could reach us as easily as we could reach them. Naturalizers, those in the West who appeal to a Nature Out There, unconstructed and nonnegotiable, are now confronted by people saying the same of the Koran and *Shari'a*. And when one fundamentalism butts heads with another, no peace talks are possible because there is nothing to discuss: pedagogical wars are waged to the bitter end. However, it is not the case (pace President Bush) that the present world war is between a modern culture and an archaic one. The supposed enemies of modernization are themselves modernizers in the extreme, using conceptual tools provided them by Western fundamentalism.[19] My main objection, then, to the peace terms of Ulrich Beck is that he has not put the West's own native fundamentalism up for discussion. Our naturalism has failed: it was a war plan disguised as a peace plan, and those against whom we directed it are no longer fooled. Naturalism, like any fundamentalist ideology, amounts to a prejudice against fabrication. Constructivism is not, cannot possibly be, deconstructive—quite the contrary—though the former has been regularly said to be a subset of the latter. Constructivism is the attitude of those who make things and are capable of telling good from bad fabrications, who want to compare their goods with those of others so that the standards of their own products improve. But for this diplomatic task to begin, a state of war has first to be declared. And once war is declared, we can seek peace on firmer grounds: where naturalism has failed, why not try constructivism?

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[18] For a systematic exposition, see Latour and Peter Weibel, eds., *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art* (Karlsruhe, Germany: ZKM; Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

The misunderstanding between Beck and myself may stem, in the end, from differing interpretations of the present historical situation. The "first modernization," to use his favorite expression, came with a certain definition of cosmopolitanism, which corresponded to the great idea that the whole earth could actually fit snugly inside what Sloterdijk has called the "metaphysical Globe" (as imagined by Mercator, Galileo, Descartes, Leibniz, and of course Hegel).[20] The problem is that when this version of the global was invented the world was just beginning to be "globalized." The Globe on which Hegel could rely to house every event "in it" was a purely conceptual one; it was for this reason perfect, with neither shadow nor gap. Now the planet is indeed being slowly and mercilessly globalized, but there is no "global" anymore, no metaphysical Globe to offer advance welcome to inhabitants and give them their rightful and predetermined places. So the two meanings of *cosmopolitanism* are, so to speak, out of sync: just when we need the Global, it has sunk deep down in the Atlantic, beyond repair. Therefore, in my view, another definition of *cosmopolitics* is called for, one that does not rely on the “first modernity” dream of an already existing common Sphere. It would be a tragic mistake to pursue peace by dragging in the defunct Globe as a locus for the common world of cosmopolitanism. Since Ulrich Beck does not wish to be Munich’s Hegel, he knows fairly well that the parliament in which a common world could be assembled has got to be constructed from scratch.

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[19] Compare my assumption here that Islamic fundamentalism is a form of modernization with, e.g., Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001), and Emmanuel Todd, *Après l'Empire: Essai sur la décomposition du système américain* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002).

[20] There is a direct connection between Beck's cosmopolitan interest and those of the great German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk. The difference is that, in the latter's "spherology," the questions are raised in terms of "air conditioning" and "life support." In his three-volume inquiry into the shape of spheres, he shows how and why the Global *has existed* in the past but is no longer a structure in which we can freely breathe. For an excellent overview of his philosophy, see Peter Sloterdijk, *Ni le soleil ni la mort: Jeu de piste sous forme de dialogues avec Hans-Jürgen Heinrichs* (Paris: Pauvert, 2003).

EXCHANGING PERSPECTIVES

The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro

At the outset of his reply to Ulrich Beck in this symposium, Bruno Latour cites a case study of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and repeats an anecdote he tells about Amerindians and conquistadors talking at cross-purposes. Latour deploys the story to illustrate his claim that even the most well-intentioned and sophisticated peacemakers can get us into worse trouble than we were in when negotiations began. The problem, he says, is that the likelihood is low that either side in a communication, let alone a formal negotiation, knows what the other side thinks is under discussion. Negotiating contradictory opinions may seem difficult enough, but in cases of deep enmity, opinions are not what is at stake. The disagreements are ontological: enemies disagree, as Latour cites Viveiros de Castro saying, about what world we inhabit. And when peace is achieved, it does not consist in agreement to a set of opinions or principles; the parties begin, rather, to live in a different world. The article that follows is not the one to which Latour refers but a later and related paper, appearing here in English for the first time. It has already been published, in a somewhat different version, in Italian and for an anthropological audience. It was not written for this symposium, in other words, and does not directly respond to either Latour or Beck; but Viveiros de Castro has revised the article for inclusion here, and its relevance should be immediately apparent.
—*Editor*

Common Knowledge 10:3

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My subject is the cosmological setting of an indigenous Amazonian model of the self.[1] I will examine two major contexts, shamanism and warfare, in which "self" and "other" develop especially complex relations. Shamanism deals with the relation between humans and nonhumans; and in warfare, a human other, an "enemy," is used to bring a "self" into existence. I will deliberately use a set of traditional dichotomies (I mean, in the tradition of modernity) as both heuristic instruments and foils: nature/culture, subject/object, production/exchange, and so forth. This very crude technique for setting off the distinctive features of Amazonian cosmologies carries the obvious risk of distortion, since it is unlikely that any nonmodern cosmology can be adequately described either by means of such conceptual polarities or as a simple negation of them (as if the only point of a nonmodern cosmology were to stand in opposition to our oppositions). But the technique does have the advantage of showing how unstable and problematic those polarities can be made to appear, once they have been forced to bear "unnatural" interpretations and unexpected rearrangements.

Perspectival Multinaturalism

If there is one virtually universal Amerindian notion, it is that of an original state of nondifferentiation between humans and animals, as described in mythology. Myths are filled with beings whose form, name, and behavior inextricably mix human and animal attributes in a common context of intercommunicability, identical to that which defines the present-day intrahuman world. Amerindian myths speak of a state of being where self and other interpenetrate, submerged in the same immanent, presubjective and preobjective milieu, the end of which is precisely what the mythology sets out to tell. This end is, of course, the well-known separation of "culture" and "nature"—of human and nonhuman—that Claude Lévi-Strauss has shown to be the central theme of Amerindian mythology and which he deems to be a cultural universal.[2]

In some respects, the Amerindian separation between humans and animals may be seen as an analogue of our "nature/culture" distinction; there is, however, at least one crucial difference between the Amerindian and modern, popular Western versions. In the former case, the separation was not brought about by a process of differentiating the human from the animal, as in our own evolutionist "scientific" mythology. For Amazonian peoples, *the original common condition of both humans and animals is not animality but*, *rather*, *humanity*. The great separation reveals not so much culture distinguishing itself from nature as nature distancing itself from culture: the myths tell how animals lost the qualities inherited or retained by humans. Humans are those who continue as they have always been. *Animals are ex-humans (rather than humans*, *ex-animals)*. In some cases, humankind is the substance of the primordial plenum or the original form of virtually everything, not just animals. As Gerald Weiss puts it:

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[1] Hypotheses that I have offered previously ("Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, n.s., 4.3 [1998]: 469–88) are rehearsed here since they ground the argument of this article. I gave an early version of the present paper, in English, at the Chicago meeting of the American Anthropological Association in November 1999, and that version was subsequently published in Italian as "La transformazione degli ogetti in sogetti nelle ontologie amerindiane," *Etnosistemi* 7.7 (2000): 47–58. The title of that paper (a version of which is the subtitle of this essay) pays homage to Nancy Munn, "The Transformation of Subjects into Objects in Walbiri and Pitjantjara Myth," in *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology*, ed. Ronald M. Berndt (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1970).

[2] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologiques*, 4 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1964–71).

> Campa mythology is largely the story of how, one by one, the primal Campa became irreversibly transformed into the first representatives of various species of animals and plants, as well as astronomical bodies or features of the terrain. . . . The development of the universe, then, has been primarily a process of diversification, with mankind as the primal substance out of which many if not all of the categories of beings and things in the universe arose, the Campa of today being the descendants of those ancestral Campa who escaped being transformed.[3]

The fact that many "natural" species or entities were originally human has important consequences for the present-day state of the world. While our folk anthropology holds that humans have an original animal nature that must be coped with by culture—having been wholly animals, we remain animals "at bottom"—Amerindian thought holds that, having been human, animals must still be human, albeit in an unapparent way. Thus, many animal species, as well as sundry other types of nonhuman beings, are supposed to have a spiritual component that qualifies them as "people." Such a notion is often associated with the idea that the manifest bodily form of each species is an envelope (a "clothing") that conceals an internal humanoid form, usually visible to the eyes of only the particular species and of "transspecific" beings such as shamans. This internal form is the soul or spirit of the animal: an intentionality or subjectivity formally identical to human consciousness. If we conceive of humans as somehow composed of a cultural clothing that hides and controls an essentially animal nature, Amazonians have it the other way around: animals have a human, sociocultural inner aspect that is "disguised" by an ostensibly bestial bodily form.

Another important consequence of having animals and other types of nonhumans conceived as people—as kinds of humans—is that the relations between the human species and most of what we would call "nature" take on the quality of what we would term "social relations." Thus, categories of relationship and modes of interaction prevailing in the intrahuman world are also in force in most

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3. Gerald Weiss, "Campa Cosmology," *Ethnology* 11.2 (April 1972): 169–70.

contexts in which humans and nonhumans confront each other. Cultivated plants may be conceived as blood relatives of the women who tend them, game animals may be approached by hunters as affines, shamans may relate to animal and plant spirits as associates or enemies.

Having been people, animals and other species continue to be people behind their everyday appearance. This idea is part of an indigenous theory according to which the different sorts of persons—human and nonhuman (animals, spirits, the dead, denizens of other cosmic layers, plants, occasionally even objects and artifacts)—apprehend reality from distinct points of view. The way that humans perceive animals and other subjectivities that inhabit the world differs profoundly from the way in which these beings see humans (and see themselves). Under normal conditions, humans see humans as humans; they see animals as animals, plants as plants. As for spirits, to see these usually invisible beings is a sure sign that conditions are not normal. On the other hand, animals (predators) and spirits see humans as animals (as game or prey) to the same extent that game animals see humans as spirits or as predator animals. By the same token, animals and spirits see themselves as humans: they perceive themselves as (or they become) anthropomorphic beings when they are in their own houses or villages; and, most important, they experience their own habits and characteristics in the form of culture. Animals see their food as human food (jaguars see blood as manioc beer, vultures see the maggots in rotting meat as grilled fish); they see their bodily attributes (fur, feathers, claws, beaks) as body decorations or cultural instruments; they see their social system as organized in the same way as human institutions are (with chiefs, shamans, ceremonies, exogamous moieties, and whatnot).

The contrast with our conceptions in the modern West is, again, only too clear. Such divergence invites us to imagine an ontology I have called "multinaturalist" so as to set it off from modern "multiculturalist" ontologies.[4] Where the latter are founded on the mutually implied unity of nature and multiplicity of cultures—the former guaranteed by the objective universality of body and substance, the latter generated by the subjective particularity of spirit and meaning—the Amerindian conception presumes a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity. For them, culture or the subject is the form of the universal, while nature or the object is the form of the particular.

To say that humanity is the original common condition of humans and nonhumans alike is tantamount to saying that the soul or spirit—the subjective aspect of being—is the universal, unconditioned given (since the souls of all nonhumans are humanlike), while objective bodily nature takes on an a posteriori, particular, and conditioned quality. In this connection, it is also worth noticing that the notion of matter as a universal substrate seems wholly absent from Ama-

[4] See Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis." For a generalization of the notion of "multinaturalism," see Bruno Latour, *Politiques de la nature* (Paris: La Découverte, 1999), and, of course, his contribution to this symposium.

zonian ontologies.[5] Reflexive selfhood, not material objectivity, is the potential common ground of being.

To say, then, that animals and spirits are people is to say that they are persons; and to personify them is to attribute to nonhumans the capacities of conscious intentionality and social agency that define the position of the subject.[6] Such capacities are reified in the soul or spirit with which these nonhumans are endowed. Whatever possesses a soul is capable of having a point of view, and every being to whom a point of view is attributed is a subject; or better, wherever there is a point of view, there is a "subject position." Our constructionist epistemology can be summed up in the Saussurean (and very Kantian) formula, "the point of view creates the object."[7] The subject, in other words, is the original, fixed condition whence the point of view emanates (the subject creates the point of view). Whereas Amerindian perspectival ontology proceeds as though *the point of view creates the subject*: whatever is activated or "agented" by the point of view will be a subject.

The attribution of humanlike consciousness and intentionality (to say nothing of human bodily form and cultural habits) to nonhuman beings has been indiscriminately termed "anthropocentrism" or "anthropomorphism." However, these two labels can be taken to denote radically opposed cosmological perspectives. Western popular evolutionism, for instance, is thoroughly anthropocentric but not particularly anthropomorphic. On the other hand, animism may be characterized as anthropomorphic but definitely not as anthropocentric: if sundry other beings besides humans are "human," then we humans are not a special lot (so much for "primitive narcissism").

Karl Marx wrote of man, meaning *Homo sapiens*:

> In creating an objective world by his practical activity, in working-up inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species being. . . . Admittedly animals also produce. . . . But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-sidedly, while man produces universally. . . . An animal produces only itself, whilst man reproduces the whole of nature. . . . An animal forms things in accordance with the standard and the need of the species to which it belongs, whilst man knows how to produce in accordance to the standards of other species.[8]

Talk about primitive narcissism. . . . Whatever Marx meant by the proposition that man "produces universally," I fancy he was saying something to the effect that man is the universal animal: an intriguing idea. (If man is the universal animal, then perhaps each animal species would be a particular kind of humanity?) While apparently converging with the Amerindian notion that humanity is the universal form of the subject, Marx's is in fact an absolute inversion of the notion. Marx is saying that humans can be any animal (we have more "being" than any other species), while Amerindians say that any animal can be human (there is more "being" to an animal than meets the eye). Man is the universal animal in two entirely different senses, then: the universality is anthropocentric for Marx; anthropomorphic, for Amerindians.

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[5] But see Anne Osborn, "Comer y ser comido: Los animales en la tradicion oral U'wa (tunebo)," *Boletin del Museo del Oro* 26 (1990): 13–41.

[6] Animals and other nonhumans are subjects not because they are human (humans in disguise); rather, they are human because they are subjects (potential subjects).

[7] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916; Paris: Payot, 1981), 23.

[8] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 75–76.

The Subjectification of Objects

Much of the Amerindians' practical engagement with the world presupposes that present-day nonhuman beings have a spiritual, invisible, prosopomorphic side. That supposition is foregrounded in the context of shamanism. By shamanism, I mean the capacity evinced by some individuals to cross ontological boundaries deliberately and adopt the perspective of nonhuman subjectivities in order to administer the relations between humans and nonhumans. Being able to see nonhumans as they see themselves (they see themselves as humans), shamans are able to take on the role of active interlocutors in transspecific dialogues and are capable (unlike lay persons) of returning to tell the tale. If a human who is not a shaman happens to see a nonhuman (an animal, a dead human soul, a spirit) in human form, he or she runs the risk of being overpowered by the nonhuman subjectivity, of passing over to its side and being transformed into an animal, a dead human, a spirit. A meeting or exchange of perspectives is, in brief, a dangerous business.

Shamanism is a form of acting that presupposes a mode of knowing, a particular ideal of knowledge. That ideal is, in many respects, the exact opposite of the objectivist folk epistemology of our tradition. In the latter, the category of the object supplies the telos: to know is to objectify—that is, to be able to distinguish what is inherent to the object from what belongs to the knowing subject and has been unduly (or inevitably) projected into the object. To know, then, is to *desubjectify*, to make explicit the subject's partial presence in the object so as to reduce it to an ideal minimum. In objectivist epistemology, subjects as much as objects are seen as the result of a process of objectification. The subject constitutes/recognizes itself in the objects it produces, and the subject knows itself objectively when it comes to see itself from the outside as an "it." Objectification is the name of our game; what is not objectified remains unreal and abstract. The form of the other is *the thing*.

Amerindian shamanism is guided by the opposite ideal. To know is to personify, to take on the point of view of that which must be known. Shamanic knowledge aims at something that is a someone—another subject. The form of the other is *the person*. What I am defining here is what anthropologists of yore used to call animism, an attitude that is far more than an idle metaphysical tenet, for the attribution of souls to animals and other so-called natural beings entails a specific way of dealing with them. Being conscious subjects able to communicate with humans, these natural beings are able fully to reciprocate the intentional stance that humans adopt with respect to them.

Recently, there has been a new surge of interest in animism.[9] Cognitive anthropologists and psychologists have been arguing that animism is an "innate" cognitive attitude that has been naturally selected for its attention-grabbing potential and its practical predictive value.[10] I have no quarrel with these hypotheses. Whatever the grounds of its naturalness, however, animism can also be very much cultural—that is, animism can be put to systematic and deliberate use. We must observe that Amerindians do not spontaneously see animals and other nonhumans as persons; the personhood or subjectivity of the latter is considered a nonevident aspect of them. It is necessary *to know how* to personify nonhumans, and it is necessary to personify them in *order to know*.[11]

Personification or subjectification implies that the "intentional stance" adopted with respect to the world has been in some way universalized. Instead of reducing intentionality to obtain a perfectly objective picture of the world, animism makes the inverse epistemological bet. True (shamanic) knowledge aims to reveal a maximum of intentionality or abduct a maximum of agency (here I am using Alfred Gell's vocabulary).[12] A good interpretation, then, would be one able to understand every *event* as in truth an *action*, an expression of intentional states or predicates of some subject. Interpretive success is directly proportional to the ordinal magnitude of intentionality that the knower is able to attribute to the known.[13] A thing or a state of affairs that is not amenable to subjectification—to determination of its social relation to the knower—is shamanistically uninteresting. Our objectivist epistemology follows the opposite course: it considers our commonsense intentional stance as just a shorthand that we use when the behavior of a target-object is too complicated to be broken down into elementary physical processes. An exhaustive scientific interpretation of the world would for us be able ideally to reduce every action to a chain of causal events and to reduce these events to materially dense interactions (with no "action at a distance").[14]

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[9] See especially Philippe Descola, "Constructing Natures: Symbolic Ecology and Social Practice," in *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Descola and Gísli Pálsson (London: Routledge, 1996), 82–102; and Nurit Bird-David, "'Animism' Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology," *Current Anthropology* 40, supp. (February 1999): 67–91.

[10] See Pascal Boyer, "What Makes Anthropomorphism Natural: Intuitive Ontology and Cultural Representations," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, n.s., 2.1 (March 1996): 83–97; and Stewart Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[11] "The same convention requires that the objects of interpretation—human or not—become understood as other persons; indeed, the very act of interpretation presupposes the personhood of what is being interpreted. . . . What one thus encounters in making interpretations are always counter-interpretations." Marilyn Strathern, *Property, Substance, and Effect: Anthropological Essays on Persons and Things* (London: Athlone, 1999), 239.

[12] Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).

[13] I am referring here to Daniel Dennett's idea of *n*-order intentional systems: a second-order intentional system is one to which the observer must ascribe not only beliefs, desires, and other intentions, but beliefs (etc.) *about* other beliefs (etc.). The standard cognitive thesis holds that only humans exhibit second- or higher-order intentionality. My shamanistic "principle of abduction of a maximum of agency" runs afoul of the creed of physicalist psychology: "Psychologists have often appealed to a principle known as Lloyd Morgan's Canon of Parsimony, which can be viewed as a special case of Occam's Razor: it is the principle that one should attribute to an organism as little intelligence or consciousness or rationality or mind as will suffice to account for its behaviour." Daniel Dennett, *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology* (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1978), 274.

If in the naturalist view a subject is an insufficiently analyzed object, in the Amerindian animist cosmology the converse holds: *an object is an incompletely interpreted subject*. The object must either be "expanded" to a full-fledged subject—a spirit; an animal in its human, reflexive form—or else understood as related to a subject (as existing, in Gell's terms, "in the neighbourhood" of an agent). But an important qualification must now be made: Amerindian cosmologies do not as a rule attribute personhood (or the same degree of personhood) to each type of entity in the world. In the case of animals, for instance, the emphasis seems to be on those species that perform key symbolic and practical roles, such as the great predators and the principal species of prey for humans. Personhood and "perspectivity"—the capacity to occupy a point of view—is a question of degree and context rather than an absolute, diacritical property of particular species.

Still, despite this qualification, what cannot be conceived as a primary agent or subject in its own right must be traced up to one:

> "Social agents" can be drawn from categories which are as different as chalk and cheese . . . because "social agency" is not defined in terms of "basic" biological attributes (such as inanimate thing vs. incarnate person) but is relational—it does not matter, in ascribing "social agent" status, what a thing (or a person) "is" in itself; what matters is where it stands in a network of social relations. All that may be necessary for stocks and stones to become "social agents" . . . is that there should be actual human persons/agents "in the neighbourhood" of these inert objects.[15]

Though there are Amazonian cosmologies that deny to postmythical nonhuman species any spiritual dimension, the notion (widespread, as is well known, throughout the continent) of animal or plant "spirit masters" supplies the missing agency. These spirit masters, equipped with an intentionality fully equivalent to that of humans, function as hypostases of the species with which they are associated, thereby creating an intersubjective field for human/nonhuman relations even where empirical nonhuman species are not spiritualized. Moreover, the idea that nonhuman agents experience themselves and their behavior in the forms of (human) culture plays a crucial role: translating culture into the terms of alien subjectivities transforms many natural objects and events into indices from which social agency is derivable. The commonest case is that of defining what to humans is a brute fact or object as an artifact or cultured behavior: what is blood to us is manioc beer to jaguars, a muddy waterhole is seen by tapirs as a great ceremonial house. Artifacts have this interestingly ambiguous ontology. They are objects that necessarily point to a subject; as congealed actions, they are material embodiments of nonmaterial intentionality. What is nature to us may well be culture to another species.

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[14] Cf. Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), 355: "La pensée sauvage est logique, dans le même sens et de la même façon que la nôtre, mais comme l'est seulement la nôtre quand elle s'applique à la connaissance d'un univers auquel elle reconnaît simultanément des propriétés physiques et des propriétés sémantiques."

[15] Gell, *Art and Agency*, 123.

Perspectivism Is Not Relativism

The idea of a world comprising a multiplicity of subject positions looks very much like a form of relativism. Or rather, relativism under its various definitions is often implied in the ethnographic characterization of Amerindian cosmologies. Take, for instance, the work of Kaj Århem, the ethnographer of the Makuna. Having described the elaborate perspectival universe of this Tukanoan people of northwestern Amazonia, Århem observes that the notion of multiple viewpoints on reality implies that, as far as the Makuna are concerned, "every perspective is equally valid and true" and that "a correct and true representation of the world does not exist."[16] Århem is right, of course; but only in a sense. For one can reasonably surmise that as far as humans are concerned, the Makuna would say that there is indeed only one correct and true representation of the world. If *you* start seeing, for instance, the maggots in rotten meat as grilled fish, you may be sure that you are in deep trouble, but grilled fish they are from the *vultures*' point of view. Perspectives should be kept separate. Only shamans, who are so to speak species-androgynous, can make perspectives communicate, and then only under special, controlled conditions.

My real point, however, is best put as a question: does the Amerindian perspectivist theory posit, as Århem maintains that it does, a multiplicity of *representations* of the same world? It is sufficient to consider ethnographic evidence to see that the opposite is the case: all beings perceive ("represent") the world *in the*

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[16] Kaj Århem, "Ecosofía Makuna," in *La selva humanizada: Ecología alternativa en el trópico húmedo colombiano*, ed. François Correa (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología; Fondo FEN Colombia; Fondo Editorial CEREC, 1993), 124.

same way. What varies is the *world* that they see. Animals impose the same categories and values on reality as humans do—their worlds, like ours, revolve around hunting and fishing, cooking and fermented drinks, cross-cousins and war, initiation rituals, shamans, chiefs, spirits, and so forth. Being people in their own sphere, nonhumans see things just *as* people do. But the things *that* they see are different. Again, what to us is blood is maize beer to the jaguar; what to us is soaking manioc is, to the souls of the dead, a rotting corpse; what is a muddy waterhole to us is for the tapirs a great ceremonial house.

Another good discussion of Amazonian "relativism" can be found in a study of the Matsiguenga by France-Marie Renard-Casevitz. Commenting on a myth in which the human protagonists travel to villages inhabited by strange people who call the snakes, bats, and balls of fire that they eat by the names of foods ("fish," "agouti," "macaws") appropriate for human consumption, she realizes that indigenous perspectivism is quite different from relativism. Yet she sees no special problem:

> This setting in perspective [*mise en perspective*] is just the application and transposition of universal social practices, such as the fact that a mother and a father of X are the parents-in-law of Y. . . . This variability of the denomination as a function of the place occupied explains how A can be both fish for X and snake for Y.[17]

But applying the positional relativity that obtains in social and cultural terms to the difference between species has a paradoxical consequence: Matsiguenga preferences are universalized and made absolute. A human culture is thus rendered natural—everybody eats fish and nobody eats snake.

Be that as it may, Casevitz's analogy between kinship positions and what counts as fish or snake for different species remains intriguing. Kinship terms are relational pointers; they belong to the class of nouns that define something in terms of its relations to something else (linguists have special names for such nouns—"two-place predicates" and such like). Concepts like fish or tree, on the other hand, are proper, self-contained substantives: they are applied to an object by virtue of its intrinsic properties. Now, what seems to be happening in Amerindian perspectivism is that substances named by substantives like *fish*, *snake*, *hammock*, or *beer* are somehow used as if they were relational pointers, something halfway between a noun and a pronoun, a substantive and a deictic. (There is supposedly a difference between "natural kind" terms such as *fish* and "artifact" terms such as *hammock*: a subject worth more discussion later.) You are a father only because there is another person whose father you are. Fatherhood is a relation, while fishiness is a intrinsic property of fish. In Amerindian perspectivism, however, something is a fish only by virtue of someone else whose fish it is.

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[17] France-Marie Renard-Casevitz, *Le banquet masqué: Une mythologie de l'étranger chez les indiens Matsiguenga* (Paris: Lierre and Coudrier, 1991), 29.

But if saying that crickets are the fish of the dead or that mud is the hammock of tapirs is like saying that my sister Isabel's son, Miguel, is my nephew, then there is no relativism involved. Isabel is not a mother "for" Miguel, from Miguel's "point of view" in the usual, relativist-subjectivist sense of the expression. Isabel is the mother *of* Miguel, she is really and objectively Miguel's mother, just as I am really Miguel's uncle. This is a genitive, internal relation (my sister is the mother of someone, our cricket the fish of someone) and not a representational, external connection of the type "X is fish for someone," which implies that X is "represented" as fish, whatever X is "in itself." It would be absurd to say that, since Miguel is the son of Isabel but not mine, then Miguel is not a son "for me"—for indeed he is. He is my sister's son, precisely.

Now imagine that all Amerindian substances were of this sort. Suppose that, as siblings are those who have the same parents, conspecifics are those that have the same fish, the same snake, the same hammock, and so forth. No wonder, then, that animals are so often conceived, in Amazonia, as affinely related to humans. Blood is to humans as manioc beer is to jaguars in exactly the way that my sister is the wife of my brother-in-law. The many Amerindian myths featuring interspecific marriages and discussing the difficult relationships between the human (or animal) in-marrying affine and his or her animal (or human) parents-in-law, simply compound the two analogies into a single complex one. We begin to see how perspectivism may have a deep connection with exchange—not only how it may be a type of exchange, but how any exchange is by definition an exchange of perspectives.[18]

We would thus have a universe that is 100 percent relational—a universe in which there would be no distinctions between primary and secondary qualities of substances or between "brute facts" and "institutional facts." This distinction, championed by John Searle, opposes brute facts or objects, the reality of which is independent of human consciousness (gravity, mountains, trees, animals, and all "natural kinds") to institutional facts or objects (marriage, money, axes, and cars) that derive their existence, identity, and efficacy from the culturally specific meanings given them by humans.[19] In this overhauled version of the nature/culture dualism, the terms of cultural relativism apply only to cultural objects and are balanced by the terms of natural universalism, which apply to natural objects. Searle would argue, I suppose, that what I am saying is that for Amerindians all facts are of the institutional, mental variety, and that all objects, even trees and fish, are like money or hammocks, in that their only reality (as money and hammocks, not as pieces of paper or of string) derives from the meanings and uses that subjects attribute to them. This would be nothing but relativism, Searle would observe—and an absolute form of relativism at that.

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[18] See Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) and "Writing Societies, Writing Persons," *History of the Human Sciences* 5.1 (February 1992): 5–16.

[19] John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (London: Allen Lane, 1995).

An implication of Amerindian perspectivist animism is, indeed, that there are no autonomous, natural facts, for what we see as nature is seen by other species as culture (as institutional facts). What humans see as blood, a natural substance, is seen by jaguars as manioc beer, an artifact. But such institutional facts are taken to be universal, culturally invariable (an impossibility according to Searle). Constructionist relativism defines all facts as institutional and thus culturally variable. We have here a case not of relativism but universalism—cultural universalism—that has as its complement what has been called "natural relativism."[20] And it is this inversion of our usual pairing of nature with the universal and culture with the particular that I have been terming "perspectivism."

Cultural (multicultural) relativism supposes a diversity of subjective and partial representations, each striving to grasp an external and unified nature, which remains perfectly indifferent to those representations. Amerindian thought proposes the opposite: a representational or phenomenological unity that is purely pronominal or deictic, indifferently applied to a radically objective diversity. One culture, multiple natures—one epistemology, multiple ontologies. Perspectivism implies multinaturalism, for a perspective is not a representation. A perspective is not a representation because representations are a property of the mind or spirit, whereas the point of view is located in the body. The ability to adopt a point of view is undoubtedly a power of the soul, and nonhumans are subjects in so far as they have (or are) spirit; but the differences between viewpoints (and a viewpoint is nothing if not a difference) lies not in the soul. Since the soul is formally identical in all species, it can only perceive the same things everywhere. The difference is given in the specificity of bodies.

This formulation permits me to provide answers to a couple of questions that may have already occurred to my readers. If nonhumans are persons and have souls, then what distinguishes them from humans? And why, being people, do they not regard us as people?

Animals see in the *same* way as we do *different* things because their bodies differ from ours. I am not referring to physiological differences—Amerindians recognize a basic uniformity of bodies—but rather to *affects*, in the old sense of dispositions or capacities that render the body of each species unique: what it eats, how it moves, how it communicates, where it lives, whether it is gregarious or solitary. The visible shape of the body is a powerful sign of these affectual differences, although the shape can be deceptive, since a human appearance could, for example, be concealing a jaguar affect. Thus, what I call "body" is not a synonym for distinctive substance or fixed shape; body is in this sense an assemblage of affects or ways of being that constitute a *habitus*. Between the formal subjectivity of souls and the substantial materiality of organisms, there is thus an intermediate plane occupied by the body as a bundle of affects and capacities. And the body is the origin of perspectives.

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[20] See Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991), 144.

Solipsism or Cannibalism

The status of humans in modern thought is essentially ambiguous. On the one hand, humankind is an animal species among other such, and animality is a domain that includes humans; on the other hand, humanity is a moral condition that excludes animals.[21] These two statuses coexist in the problematic and disjunctive notion of "human nature." In other words, our cosmology postulates a physical continuity and a metaphysical discontinuity between humans and animals, the continuity making of humankind an object for the natural sciences and the discontinuity making of humanity an object for the humanities. Spirit or mind is the great differentiator: it raises us above animals and matter in general, it distinguishes cultures, it makes each person unique before his or her fellow beings. The body, in contrast, is the major integrator: it connects us to the rest of the living, united by a universal substrate (DNA, carbon chemistry) that, in turn, links up with the ultimate nature of all material bodies. Conversely, Amerindians postulate metaphysical continuity and physical discontinuity. The metaphysical continuity results in animism; the physical discontinuity (between the beings of the cosmos), in perspectivism. The spirit or soul (here, a reflexive form, not an immaterial inner substance) integrates. Whereas the body (here, a system of intensive affects, not an extended material organism) differentiates.[22]

This cosmological picture, which understands bodies as the great differentiators, at the same time posits their inherent transformability: interspecific metamorphosis is a fact of nature. Not only is metamorphosis the standard etiological process in myth, but it is still very much possible in present-day life (being either desirable or undesirable, inevitable or evitable, according to circumstances). Spirits, the dead, and shamans can assume animal form, beasts turn into other beasts, humans inadvertently turn into animals. No surprises here: our own cosmology presumes a singular distinctiveness of minds but not even for this reason does it hold communication to be impossible (albeit solipsism is a constant problem). Nor does our cosmology discredit the mental/spiritual transformations induced by such processes as education and religious conversion. Indeed, it is because the spiritual is the locus of difference that conversion becomes a necessary idea. Bodily metamorphosis is the Amerindian counterpart to the European theme of spiritual conversion. Shamans are transformers (and likewise, the mythical demiurges who transformed primal humans into animals are themselves shamans). Shamans can see animals in their inner human form because they don animal "clothing" and thus transform themselves into animals.

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[21] See Tim Ingold, "Becoming Persons: Consciousness and Sociality in Human Evolution," *Cultural Dynamics* 4.3 (1991): 355–78; and Ingold, ed., *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology: Humanity, Culture, and Social Life*, s.v. "Humanity and Animality."

[22] The counterproof of the singularity of the spirit in modern cosmologies lies in the fact that when we try to universalize it, we are obliged—now that supernature is out of bounds—to identify it with the structure and function of the brain. The spirit can only be universal (natural) if it is (in) the body. It is no accident, I believe, that this movement of inscription of the spirit in the brain-body or in matter in general—AI, Churchland's "eliminative materialism," Dennett-style "functionalism," Sperberian cognitivism, etc.—has been synchronically countered by its opposite, the neophenomenological appeal to the body as the site of subjective singularity. Thus, we have been witnessing two seemingly contradictory projects of "embodying" the spirit: one actually reducing it to the body as traditionally (i.e., biophysically) understood, the other upgrading the body to the traditional (i.e., cultural-theological) status of "spirit."

Solipsism and metamorphosis are related in the same way. Solipsism is the phantom that threatens our cosmology, raising the fear that we will not recognize ourselves in our "own kind" because, given the potentially absolute singularity of minds, our "own kind" are actually not like us. The possibility of metamorphosis expresses the fear—the opposite fear—of no longer being able to differentiate between human and animal, and above all the fear of seeing the human who lurks within the body of the animal that one eats. Our traditional problem in the West is how to connect and universalize: individual substances are given, while relations have to be made. The Amerindian problem is how to separate and particularize: relations are given, while substances must be defined.

Hence the importance, in Amazonia, of dietary rules linked to the spiritual potency of animals. The past humanity of animals is added to their present-day spirituality, and both are hidden by their visible form. The result is an extended set of food restrictions or precautions that declare inedible animals that were, in myth, originally consubstantial with humans—though some animals can be desubjectified by shamanic means and then consumed.[23] Violation of food restrictions exposes the violator to illness, conceived of as a cannibal counterpredation undertaken by the spirit of the prey (turned predator) in a lethal inversion of perspectives that transforms human into animal. Thus cannibalism is the Amerindian parallel to our own phantom—solipsism. The solipsist is uncertain whether the natural similarity of bodies guarantees a real community of spirit.

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[23] Desubjectification is accomplished by neutralizing the spirit, transubstantiating the meat into plant food, or semantically reducing the animal subject to a species less proximate to humans.

Whereas the cannibal suspects that the similarity of souls prevails over real differences of body and thus that all animals eaten, despite efforts to desubjectivize them, remain human. To say that these uncertainties or suspicions are phantoms haunting their respective cultures does not mean, of course, that there are not solipsists among us (the more radical relativists, for instance), nor that there are not Amerindian societies that are purposefully and more or less literally cannibalistic.

Exchange as Transformation

The idea of creation ex nihilo is virtually absent from indigenous cosmogonies. Things and beings normally originate as a transformation of something else: animals, as I have noted, are transformations of a primordial, universal humanity. Where we find notions of creation at all—the fashioning of some prior substance into a new type of being—what is stressed is the imperfection of the end product. Amerindian demiurges always fail to deliver the goods. And just as nature is the result not of creation but of transformation, so culture is a product not of invention but of transference (and thus transmission, tradition). In Amerindian mythology, the origin of cultural implements or institutions is canonically explained as a borrowing—a transfer (violent or friendly, by stealing or by learning, as a trophy or as a gift) of prototypes already possessed by animals, spirits, or enemies. The origin and essence of culture is acculturation.

The idea of creation/invention belongs to the paradigm of production: production is a weak version of creation but, at the same time, is its model. Both are actions in—or rather, upon and against—the world. Production is the imposition of mental design on inert, formless matter. The idea of transformation/transfer belongs to the paradigm of exchange: an exchange event is always the transformation of a prior exchange event. There is no absolute beginning, no absolutely initial act of exchange. Every act is a response: that is, a transformation of an anterior token of the same type. *Poiesis*, creation/production/invention, is our archetypal model for action; *praxis*, which originally meant something like transformation/exchange/transfer, suits the Amerindian and other nonmodern worlds better.[24] The exchange model of action supposes that the the subject's "other" is another subject (not an object); and subjectification is, of course, what perspectivism is all about.[25] In the creation paradigm, production is causally primary; and exchange, its encompassed consequence. Exchange is a "moment" of production (it "realizes" value) and the means of *re*production. In the transformation paradigm, exchange is the condition for production since, without the proper social relations with nonhumans, no production is possible. Production is a type or mode of exchange, and the means of "reexchange" (a word we certainly do not need, for exchange is by definition reexchange). Production creates; exchange changes.

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[24] From the point of view of a hypothetical Amerindian philosopher, I would say that the Western obsession with production reveals it as the last avatar of the biblico-theological category of creation. Humans were not only created in the likeness of God, they create after His own image: they "produce." Ever since God "died," humans have produced themselves after *their* own image (and that is what culture is about, I suppose).

[25] See Strathern, "Writing Societies," 9–10.

I would venture a further remark on this contrast: the idiom of material production, if applied outside the original domain of *poiesis*, is necessarily metaphorical. When we speak of the production of persons (social reproduction) or the production of "symbolic capital" as if we meant the production of subjects rather than simply of human organisms, we are being no less metaphorical than when we apply the idiom of *praxis* to engagements between humans and nonhumans. To speak of the production of social life makes as much, or as little, sense as to speak of an exchange between humans and animals. Metaphorical Marx is not necessarily better than metaphorical Mauss.

I would speculate, further, that the emphasis on transformation/exchange (over creation/production) is organically connected to the predominance of affinal relations (created by marriage alliance) over consanguineal ones (created by parenthood) in Amerindian mythology. The protagonists of the major Amerindian myths are related agonistically as siblings-in-law, parents-in-law, children-in-law. Our own Old World mythology (Greek, Near Eastern, or Freudian) seems haunted, on the other hand, by parenthood and especially fatherhood. Not to put too fine a point on it: we had to steal fire from a divine father; Amerindians had to steal it from an animal father-in-law. Mythology is a discourse on the given, the innate. Myths address what must be taken for granted, the initial conditions with which humanity must cope and against which humanity must define itself by means of its power of "convention."[26] If such is the case, then in the Amerindian world, affinity and alliance (exchange) rather than parenthood (creation/production) comprise the given—the unconditioned condition.

The Cannibal Cogito

The analogy between shamans and warriors in Amerindian ethnographies has often been observed. Warriors are to the human world what shamans are to the universe at large: conductors or commutators of perspectives. That shamanism is warfare writ large has nothing to do with violence (though shamans often act as warriors in the literal sense). But indigenous warfare belongs to the same cosmological complex as shamanism, insofar as both involve the embodiment by the self of the enemy's point of view.[27] Accordingly, in Amazonia, what is intended in ritual exocannibalism is incorporation of the subjecthood of a hypersubjectified enemy. The intent is not (as it is in hunting game animals) desubjectification.

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[26] See Roy Wagner, *The Invention of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

The subjectification of human enemies is a complex ritual process. Suffice it to say, for our purposes here, that the process supposes a thorough identification of the killer with its victim, just as shamans become the animals whose bodies they procure for the rest of their group. Killers derive crucial aspects of their social and metaphysical identities from their victims—names, surplus souls, songs, trophies, ritual perogatives; but in order to do so, a killer must first *become* his enemy. A telling example is the Araweté war song in which a killer repeats words taught him by the spirit of the victim during the ritual seclusion that follows the deed: the killer speaks from the enemy's standpoint, saying "I" to refer to the enemy and "him" to refer to himself.[28] In order to become a full subject—for the killing of an enemy is often a precondition to adult male status—the killer must apprehend the enemy "from the inside" (as a subject). The analogy with the animist perspectival theory already discussed is clear: nonhuman subjectivities see humans as nonhumans (and vice versa). Here, the killer must be able to see himself as the enemy sees him—as, precisely, an enemy—in order to become "himself" or, rather, a "myself." It is relevant in this connection to recall that the archetypal idiom of enmity, in Amazonia, is affinity. Enemies are conceptualized as "ideal" brothers-in-law, uncontaminated by the exchange of sisters (which would "consanguinize" them—make them cognates of one's children—and thus less than pure affines).

In this idiom of enmity, then, neither party is an object. Enmity of this sort is a reciprocal subjectification: an exchange, a transfer, of points of view. It is a *ritual transformation of the self* (to use Simon Harrison's term) that belongs entirely to the "exchange" (not the "production") paradigm of action—though the exchange in this case is very extreme. Harrison describes the situation in a Melanesian context that closely resembles the Amazonian: "Just as a gift embodies the identity of its donor, so in Lowland warfare the killer acquires through homicide an aspect of his victim's identity. The killing is represented as either creating or expressing a social relationship, or else as the collapse of a social relation by the *merging of two social alters into one*."[29] The synthesis of the gift relates subjects who remain objectively separated—they are divided by the relation.[30] The killing of an enemy and its symbolic incorporation by the killer, on the other hand, produces a synthesis in which all distance is suppressed: the relation is created by abolishing one of its terms, which is then introjected by the other. The reciprocal dependence of exchange partners becomes inseparability here, a kind of fusion.

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[27] See Viveiros de Castro, *From the Enemy's Point of View: Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[28] See Viveiros de Castro, "Le meurtrier et son double chez les Araweté: Un exemple de fusion rituelle," *Systèmes de Pensée en Afrique Noire* 14 (1996): 77–104.

[29] Simon Harrison, *The Mask of War: Violence, Ritual, and the Self in Melanesia* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1993), 130.

Ontological predation appears to be the crucial idiom of subjectification in Amazonia. The relative and relational status of predator and prey is fundamental to the inversions in perspective that obtain between humans and nonhumans. Again, the Melanesian context, as Harrison describes it, presents striking parallels to that of Amazonia: "Aggression is conceived as very much a communicative act directed against the subjectivity of others, and making war required the reduction of the enemy, not to the status of a non-person or thing but, quite the opposite, to an extreme state of subjectivity."[31] Which means, Harrison concludes, that enmity in these societies "is conceptualised not as a mere objective *absence* of a social relationship but as a definite social relationship like any other" (128). This remark brings to mind a well-known passage from Lévi-Strauss:

> Les observateurs ont été souvent frappés par l'impossibilité, pour les indigènes, de concevoir une relation neutre, ou plus exactement une absence de relation . . . l'absence de relation familiale ne définit pas rien, elle définit l'hostilité . . . il n'est pas davantage possible de se tenir en deçà, ou au delà, du monde des relations.[32]

"Pour les indigènes," no difference is indifferent and must immediately be invested with positivity. Enmity is a full-blown social relationship. Not, however, a relationship like any other: I would go a bit farther than Harrison and say that the overall schema of difference in Amazonia is cannibalistic predation. At the risk of falling into allegorical excess, I would even venture to say that, in Amazonian cosmologies, the generic attributive proposition is a cannibal proposition. The copula of all synthetic a priori judgments, in a universe articulated by a "logic of sensory qualities," is carnivorous copulation. Let me insist: these predatory relations are fully and immediately social relations. We are dealing here with a mode of subjectification, internal to the *monde des relations* to which Lévi-Strauss refers. That world has nothing to do with production and objectification, modes of action that suppose a neutral relationship in which an active and exclusively human subject confronts an inert and naturalized object. In the *monde de relations*, the self is the gift of the other.

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[30] See Strathern, *Gender of the Gift*.

[31] Harrison, *Mask of War*, 121.

[32] Lévi-Strauss, *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*, 2d ed. (1949; La Haye: Mouton, 1967), 552–53.

Some Conclusions

Our current notions of the social are inevitably polarized by the oppositions I have been evoking: representation/reality, culture/nature, human/nonhuman, mind/body, and the rest. In particular, the social presupposes the nonsocial (the natural). It is impossible to rethink the social without rethinking the natural, for in our cosmological vulgate, nature (always in the singular) is the encompassing term, and society (often used in the plural) is the term encompassed.

The contrast between our basic naturalism and Amerindian cosmologies can be phrased in the terms of our own polarities. Animism could be defined as an ontology that postulates a social character to relations between humans and nonhumans: the space between nature and society is itself social. Naturalism is founded on the inverse axiom: relations between society and nature are themselves natural. Indeed, if in the animic mode the distinction "nature/culture" is internal to the social world, humans and animals being immersed in the same sociocosmic medium (and in this sense, nature is a part of an encompassing sociality), then in naturalist ontology, the distinction "nature/culture" is internal to nature (and in this sense, human society is one natural phenomenon among others). Animism has society, and naturalism has nature, as its unmarked pole: these poles function, respectively and contrastingly, as the universal dimension of each mode. This phrasing of the contrast between animism and naturalism is not only reminiscent of, or analogous to, the famous (some would say notorious) contrast between gift and commodity—I take it to be the *same* contrast, expressed in more general, noneconomic terms.[33] Likewise the distinction that I have made here between production/creation (naturalism) and exchange/transformation (animism).

In our naturalist ontology, the nature/society interface is natural: humans are organisms like all the rest—we are body-objects in ecological interaction with other bodies and forces, all of them ruled by the necessary laws of biology and physics. Productive forces harness, and thereby express, natural forces. Social relations—that is, contractual or instituted relations between subjects—can only exist internal to human society (there is no such thing as "relations of production" linking humans to animals or plants, let alone political relations). But how alien to nature—this is the problem of naturalism—are these social relations? Given the universality of nature, the status of the human and social world is unstable. Thus, Western thought oscillates, historically, between a naturalistic monism (sociobiology and evolutionary psychology being two of its current avatars) and an ontological dualism of nature and culture ("culturalism" and symbolic anthropology being two of its recent expressions).

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[33] "If in a commodity economy things and persons assume the social form of things, then in a gift economy they assume the social form of persons." Chris A. Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities* (London: Academic, 1982), 41, as cited in Strathern, *Gender of the Gift*, 134.

Still, for all its being the polar opposite of naturalistic monism, the dualism "nature/culture" discloses the ultimate referential character of the notion of nature by revealing itself to be directly descended from the theological opposition between nature and the supernatural. Culture is the modern name for Spirit—I am thinking of the distinction between *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*; or at least culture names the compromise between nature and grace. Of animism, I am tempted to say that the instability is of an opposite kind: there, the problem is how to administer the mixture of humanity and animality that constitutes animals, rather than, as is the case among ourselves, how to administer the combination of culture and nature that characterizes humans.

Amerindian perspectivism might be viewed as a radical polytheism (or rather, henotheism) applied to a universe that supports no dualism between created matter and Creator Spirit. I am led to ask whether our own naturalistic monism is not the last avatar of our monotheistic cosmology.[34] Our ontological dualisms derive ultimately from the fundamental difference between Creator and creature. Killing off the Creator, as some say we have done, has left us with a creature whose unity depends on the now-absent God. For God prepared science, and the transcendence of transcendence has created immanence.[35] This birthmark is visible on all modern efforts to dispose of dualisms. Our monistic ontologies are always derived from some prior duality—they consist essentially in the erasure of one of the terms or in the absorption (sometimes "dialectical") of the erased term by the remaining one. A genuine monism, anterior and exterior to the great divide between Creator and creature, seems beyond our reach. A lesson we can usefully draw from Amerindian perspectivism is that the relevant conceptual pair may be monism and *pluralism*: multiplicity, not mere duality, is the complement of the monism I am contemplating. Virtually all attacks on Cartesian and other dualisms consider that two is already too much—we need just one (one principle, one substance, one reality). As far as Amerindian cosmologies are concerned, it would appear that two is not enough.

My problem with the notion of relativism, or with the opposition between relativism and universalism, pertains to the concept that underwrites such categories and oppositions: the concept of representation. And my problem with representation is the ontological poverty it implies—a poverty characteristic of modern thought. The Cartesian break with medieval scholasticism produced a radical simplification of European ontology by positing only two principles or substances: unextended thought and extended matter. Modern thought began with that simplification; and its massive conversion of ontological into epistemological questions (questions of representation) is still with us. Every mode of being not assimilable to obdurate matter has had to be swallowed up by mind. The simplification of ontology has led to the enormous complication of epistemology. Once objects or things have been pacified—retreating to the exterior, silent, and uniform world of nature—subjects begin to proliferate and chatter: transcendental egos, legislative understandings, philosophies of language, theories of mind, social representations, the logic of the signifier, webs of signification, discursive practices, politics of knowledge, and, yes, anthropology of course.

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[34] The question is also posed in Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, and in Marshall Sahlins, "The Sadness of Sweetness: The Native Anthropology of Western Cosmology," *Current Anthropology* 37.3 (June 1996): 395–428—to mention only two recent works of anthropology.

[35] Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

Anthropology is a discipline plagued since its inception by epistemological angst. The most Kantian of disciplines, anthropology is practiced as if its paramount task were to explain how it comes to know (to represent) its object—an object also defined as knowledge (or representation). Is it possible to know it? Is it decent to know it? Do we really know it, or do we see it (and ourselves) through a glass, darkly? There is no way out of this maze of mirrors, mire of guilt. Reification or fetishism is our major care and scare: we began by accusing savages of confusing representations with reality; now we accuse ourselves (or, rather, our colleagues).[36]

While philosophy has been obsessed with epistemology, ontology has been annexed by physics. We have left to quantum mechanics the task of making our most boring dualism, "representation/reality," ontologically dubious. (Though physics has questioned that dualism only in the confines of a quantum world inaccessible to intuition and representation.) Supernature has thus given way to subnature as our transcendent realm. On the macroscopic side, cognitive psychology has been striving to establish a purely representational ontology, a *natural* ontology of the human species inscribed in cognition, in our mode of representing things. The representational function is ontologized in the mind but in terms set by a simpleminded ontology of mind *versus* matter.

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[36] Polarities and other "othering" devices have had bad press lately. The place of the other, however, can never remain vacant for long. As far as contemporary anthropology is concerned, the most popular candidate for the position appears to be anthropology itself. In its formative phase (never completely outgrown), anthropology's main task was to explain how and why the primitive or traditional other was wrong: savages mistook ideal connections for real ones and animistically projected social relations onto nature. In the discipline's classical phase (which lingers on), the other is Western society/culture. Somewhere along the line—with the Greeks? Christianity? capitalism?—the West got everything wrong, positing substances, individuals, separations, and oppositions wherever all other societies/cultures rightly see relations, totalities, connections, and embeddings. Because it is both anthropologically anomalous and ontologically mistaken, it is the West, rather than "primitive" cultures, that requires explanation. In the post-positivist phase of anthropology, first Orientalism, then Occidentalism, is shunned: the West and the Rest are no longer seen as so different from each other. On the one hand, we have never been modern, and, on the other hand, no society has ever been primitive. Then who is wrong, what needs explanation? (Someone must be wrong, something has to be explained.) Our anthropological forebears, who made us believe in tradition and modernity, were wrong—and so the great polarity now is between anthropology and the real practical/embodied life of everyone, Western or otherwise. In brief: formerly, savages mistook (their) representations for (our) reality; now, we mistake (our) representations for (other peoples') reality. Rumor has it we have even be mistaking (our) representations for (our) reality when we "Occidentalize."

The tug of war goes endlessly on: one side reduces reality to representation (culturalism, relativism, textualism), the other reduces representation to reality (cognitivism, sociobiology, evolutionary psychology). Even phenomenology, new or old—and especially the phenomenology invoked these days by anthropologists—may be a surrender to epistemology. Is not "lived world" a euphemism for "known world," "represented world," "world real for a subject"? *Real* reality is the (still virtual) province of cosmologists, the theorists of quantum gravity and superstring theory. But listen to these custodians of real reality and it becomes obvious—it has been obvious, I might add, for more than seventy-five years—that at the heart of the matter, there is no stuff; only form, only relation.[37] There are "materialist ontologies" on offer as cures for epistemological hypochondria, but I do not know what to do with them. All I know is that we need richer ontologies and that it is high time to put epistemological questions to rest. No effort less strenuous and transformative and dangerously disorienting would make even disagreement with an animist warrior possible.

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[37] See Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (1925; New York: Macmillan, 1948).

COMPARATIVE MYSTICS

Scholars as Gnostic Diplomats

Jeffrey J. Kripal

It is not difficult to see why Ulrich Beck's cosmopolitan viewpoint would inspire dissent. In a time of religious violence, fundamentalist politics, and attempts to erase historical memory on behalf of ethnic self-interest, it is easy to forget that, not so long ago, intelligent and pragmatic people could hope for a global worldview and even a global spirituality to emerge. It is worth remembering. It is worthwhile resisting the cynicism that comes from knowing that cosmopolitan hopes were at their highest during the colonial era. But however unwelcome the contact (unwelcome, often, on both sides), colonialism brought divergent cultures into intimate relationships whose results were not wholly or finally negative.[1] One result was that brave souls around the planet came to believe that the conflicts among cultures, religions, and "final vocabularies" could eventually be transcended.[2]

The positive results tended to be scholarly and to center on religion. In 1950, the postcolonial turning point, Raymond Schwab argued that the human venture had been ennobled and transformed during an "Oriental Renaissance" (1680–1880) when scholars labored diligently, if imperfectly, at the project of translation and religious interpretation. "Few people today," Schwab wrote,

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[1] For the colonialists' own traumas, see Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600–1850* (New York: Anchor, 2004).

[2] "Final vocabulary" is a useful term of Richard Rorty's: see *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

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> seem to have heard of Anquetil-Duperron or Sir William Jones or what they set out to accomplish in India in the eighteenth century, but they have drastically altered our ways of thinking nonetheless. Why, then, is the fact generally unknown? The truth is that, in seizing upon the treasures of the poor Orient, critics have grasped only superficial influences that conceal the real issues, which concern the destinies of the intellect and the soul.[3]

Schwab was most likely thinking of the effects that Asian and Middle Eastern cultures had had on the European mind, but, as we well know, the effects of Orientalism were no less profound in Asia and the Middle East. Indeed, Asian and Middle Eastern actors often did more than anyone to advance the cultural exchange. As participants in cultures that had neither created nor fully participated in the astonishing scientific, political, and cultural achievements of the Enlightenment, these individuals were keenly aware of what might be gained from cross-cultural encounter, even if they usually described their activity in terms of redressing imbalances and injustices. Many, on all sides, saw cross-cultural transformation as the secret to a better, more balanced world, and they often turned to religion as the place to signify or effect these new "destinies of the intellect and the soul."

Schwab locates the beginnings of this "conversion" in the mid–eighteenth century and observes how its rise and development coincided with not just colonialism but also Romanticism:

> The ability to decipher unknown alphabets, acquired in Europe after 1750, had one incalculable effect: the discovery that there had been other Europes. Thus, in that progressive era, the West perceived that it was not the sole possessor of an admirable intellectual past. This singular event occurred during a period when everything else was likewise new, unprecedented, extraordinary. The advent of oriental studies during a Romantic period abounding in geniuses and accomplishments, in great appetites and abundant nourishment, is one of history's most astonishing coincidences.[4]

Schwab, moreover, saw, in the synergies of European Romanticism and the cultural riches of the Orient, a hopeful answer to the violence, bigotry, and mass death of World War II: "So many prophets of doom cry out to our age of a world near its end that it feels itself susceptible to what has never moved it before. Now is the time to present to our age . . . the birth of an integral humanism, a crucial, unprecedented chapter in the history of civilizations."[5]

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[3] Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880*, trans. Gene Patterson and Victor Reinking (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), xxiii.

[4] Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, xxiii.

[5] Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, xxiii.

I begin with Schwab's postwar "integral humanism" because, first, I recognize myself to be an heir, and a grateful one, of Schwab's Oriental Renaissance.[6] But my reasons for beginning with Schwab go far beyond the personal. The global meeting of Eastern and Western religions has dramatically changed the theologies of Western Christianity, in particular that of the Roman Catholic Church.[7] The Oriental Renaissance has been definitive as well for modern Hinduism—definitive in its pluralistic expressions (Aurobindo's evolutionary metaphysics, for example, or Gandhi's theology of nonviolence) but also in the violent fundamentalism or essentialist politics of *Hindutva* ("Hinduness"), which, in resisting cross-cultural exchange, models itself on Western fascism and Muslim exclusivism.[8] It is by now a truism among Indologists that the colonial encounter between East and West crystallized the present semiotic field: Hinduism is a modern idea—indeed a word that did not exist until fairly recently (the abstract noun did not appear in *Webster's Dictionary* until 1849).[9]

To invoke the Oriental Renaissance, then, is not simply to recall a distant memory; it is also to observe how, in the modern context, the development of a world religion began. Some readers will take "world religion" as a threat. I take it as a hope, though also a warning: we must finally assume responsibility for our social constructions and ask hard practical questions about their ability to produce a world at relative peace. "Solidarity is not," as Richard Rorty puts it, "discovered by reflection but created."[10] Or in Bruno Latour's words: "The common world . . . must be progressively composed . . . an immense task which we will need to accomplish one step at a time."[11]

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[6] All of my own work has been motivated by what I have called a "mystical humanism," in effect a version of Schwab's integral humanism that brings together the worlds of Western critical theory and Asian mystical thought, on the one hand, and those of the Asian philosophical traditions and Western mystical thought, on the other hand.

[7] The Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate* is among the most dramatic examples of this shift from the doctrine of *nulla salus extra ecclesiam* ("there is no salvation outside the church") to a more humble inclusivism. The Roman Catholic Church now acknowledges, for example, that "in Hinduism men explore the divine mystery and express it both in the limitless riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy" and that Buddhism proposes a way of life in which "men can, with confidence and trust, attain a state of perfect liberation and reach supreme illumination either through their own efforts or by the aid of divine help" (October 28, 1965, *Nostra Aetate*—Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery [Collegeville, IN: Liturgical Press, 1992]). For a summary and analysis of this extraordinary development within Catholic theology, see Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997).

[8] Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Lise McKean, *Divine Enterprise: Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Arundhati Roy, "Fascism's Firm Footprint in India," *Nation*, September 30, 2002.

[9] There is a great deal of critical discussion around both the terms "Hindu" and "Hinduism." Generally speaking, this literature suggests that "Hindu" probably first occurred as a Persian geographical term for those who live beyond (that is, east of) the Indus River. As a term designating a religion, still inclusive of what were later to be differentiated as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, it may have been first deployed by the Muslim invaders of the early part of the second millennium (Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1989], 6). As an indigenous self-description, "Hindu" was used in Sanskrit and Bengali texts as a counterterm to *Yavana* (Muslim) as early as the sixteenth century. The English term "Hindu" (or "Hindoo") were first used by British colonialists to describe the people of Hindustan, that is, the area of northwest India, and hence it did not yet carry any specific religious or sectarian meanings. The -ism was added around 1830 to denote the culture and religion of high-caste Brahmins and was then soon appropriated by Indian reformers to establish a national, cultural, and religious identity around ancient scriptural texts, ritual practices, and religious forms of identity. Gavin Flood is thus certainly not far off the mark when he states that "Hinduism" cannot be understood as a pure product of Western Orientalists: it also represents a development of Hindu self-understanding and so "a transformation in the modern world of themes already present" (Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 8).

Comparative Mystics

The construction that Latour and Rorty and, I dare say, Beck as well have in mind will not become possible until we are ready—as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro appears to suggest here—to take the risk of mutual contamination and transformation across worldviews. Here I want to make explicit what Viveiros de Castro seems to intimate: the value of the outsider in bringing seemingly incompatible cultural forms together. There are those—in Viveiros de Castro's ethnography, they are shamans—with a scandalous ability to think beyond borders drawn literally on a map or cognitively in the recesses of cultural, religious, and even sexual identity. Given the efforts and successes of such (admittedly rare) people, we need to rethink the ontological status of difference itself, particularly within those literatures and practices that we have come to call "mystical."

My adjectival noun is chosen carefully here as a term of art possessing long lineages in (but irreducible to) Christian spirituality, American psychology, the modern study of religion, and French poststructuralism, all of which I will get to in due course. For now, it is necessary only to explicate my title, "Comparative Mystics," as an intentional double entendre rooted in French psychoanalytic and poststructuralist studies of mystical literature. I am indebted in particular to the historian Michel de Certeau, whose unique use of the adjectival noun *la mystique* appears in my own work as "the mystical." Michael B. Smith, de Certeau's translator, explicates his use of the French term this way:

> The theme of Michel de Certeau's *Mystic Fable* is *la mystique*. This term cannot be rendered accurately by the English word "mysticism," which would correspond rather to the French *le mysticisme*, and be far too generic and essentialist a term to convey the historical specificity of the subject of this study. There is no need here to retrace the steps by which *la mystique*, the noun, emerged from the prior adjective, *mystique*. . . . But it may be of some interest to note that this grammatical promotion has its parallel in English, in the development of such terms as "mathemat-

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[10] Rorty, *Contingency*, xvi.

[11] Bruno Latour, *War of the Worlds: What about Peace?* trans. Charlotte Bigg (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2002), 29.

> ics" or "physics," fields of inquiry of increasing autonomy, also taking their names from an adjectival forerunner. I have, therefore, *in extremis*, adopted the bold solution of introducing a made-up English term, *mystics* . . . to render *la mystique*, a field that might have won (but never did, in English) a name alongside metaphysics, say, or optics.[12]

For our present context, I have added to Smith's neologism *mystics* the qualifier *comparative* to indicate a discourse that undermines the doctrinal claims of individual religions by setting them beside the claims of other religions. The purpose of such a comparative mystics is to expose all doctrinal claims as historically and culturally relative expressions of a deeper mystery or ontological ground that nevertheless requires these relative expressions for its self-revelation. Through comparative mystics (as a disciplinary field or practice) and its comparative mystics (as historical exemplars), I want to question whether it is the case that, as Latour asserts, constructivism has no opposite.[13]

My thesis, baldly stated (but developed in some detail below), will be that cultural differences and local knowledge are socially and politically important but not ontologically ultimate, and that ontological ultimacy—which flourishes especially in subversive countercultures or mystical traditions—is the level at which deep communication may be realizable. Before starting on this argument, however, I need to list a variety of reservations, lest I be misunderstood and dismissed out of hand. I am not suggesting, for example, that this potential role of the mystical in our own day would repeat or return to some past revelation or some complete religious truth, or that the mystical traditions are without their own serious ethical liabilities and intellectual failures. On the contrary, I would say that modern social and intellectual forms (democracy, science, individualism, human rights, capitalism, globalism) themselves represent a fundamentally new revelation of human spirit with which the religions and their mystical countercultures must come positively to terms. Nor do I want to suggest that a turn to the mystical should be equated, as it so often is in popular literature, with vacuous thinking about "experience," "unity," and "purity" (this last term usually a stand-in for prudery, sexual ignorance, and misogyny). Searing self-criticism, fury, eros, and the hard intellectual labor of repudiation are more what I have in mind. In this same apophatic spirit, I will not presume to intuit a common essence to the world religions that can offer a stable basis for diplomacy. I do think that mystical traditions bear uncanny resemblances to each other, but I locate these similarities in the methods employed by these traditions to subvert their religions' local knowledge and practices. In short, I do not want to lose sight of the historical fact, so often forgotten, that many of these mystical traditions are *counter*cultures that have been persecuted, sometimes quite violently, by their own orthodox religious authorities.

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[12] Michael B. Smith, translator's note to *The Mystic Fable*, vol. 1, *The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, by Michel de Certeau (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), ix–x.

[13] Latour, *War of the Worlds*, 40.

I recognize, of course, that mystical traditions have served conservative, even violent ends; one thinks, for example, of St. Bernard of Clairvaux preaching the Crusades.[14] And I am aware too that, as Mark Sedgwick reminds us, the idea of a universal mysticism or "perennial philosophy" has buttressed an antimodern traditionalism that has had fascist and terrorist expressions.[15] In other words, mysticism can become simply another religious nightmare, another fundamentalist pathology. Hence it is countercultural manifestations of the mystical that I highlight here: what I am offering, then, is heresy. More precisely, I offer an academic gnosticism that can stand up against the petty and violent demiurge-gods that rule so much of our religious worlds. I have few illusions about how such words might go over with orthodox religious believers: my own writing has been the object of Internet hate campaigns, media attacks, and two organized ban movements in India (the last of which ended in the Rajyasabha or upper house of parliament).[16] I would only insist that countercultures are inconceivable without cultures, and that every orthodoxy must produce its own balancing heresies. Even in my "transgressions" and "subversions," then, I deny that there can be any such thing. My point, indeed, is to deny the logical and ontological status of dualism and of difference itself.

Toward this end (it is really more of a beginning), I will proceed in three related movements: the first two treat two very different historical periods and their defining contexts (British colonialism in nineteenth-century India and the twentieth-century American counterculture). The third turns to more theoretical discourse in an attempt to link them. I will begin in nineteenth-century Bengal with the archetypal Hindu example of East-West encounter, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (1836–86), examining in some textual detail his comparative, deconstructive, and dialectical experiments with religious difference—that is, his own comparative mystics. Next, I will return to the present and the historical genesis of those unique places in Western culture where the mystical and philosophical experiments of Ramakrishna are carried forward in some of their most sophisticated forms: the American Academy of Religion, academic publishing, and the standard college course on "comparative religion." In effect, I want to use the Indian archetype of Ramakrishna in order to explore the analogous mystical acts of contemporary Western intellectuals, students, and practitioners. In the process, I will suggest that whereas it was British colonialism that generated and made necessary the religious experiments and mystical subversions of Ramakrishna, it was the American counterculture that generated the personalities, research foci, and general spirit of the modern comparative study of religion, at least as it is presently practiced in the United States. Finally, I will explore the theoretical categories of counterculture, gnosticism, and apophaticism as fruitful places to look for ways to better understand our own comparative mystics. The same categories, it is a part of my argument, could serve us well in our tasks of unpacking our dysfunctional religious pasts (and they all *are* dysfunctional within our present social circumstances). We need to construct new histories and to join our countercultural projects across cultural and religious boundaries. Indeed, it is this comparative project across time and clime that is structurally "mystical" in the sense that it recognizes the importance of cultural particularity but denies the ontological ultimacy of difference itself. To compare, after all, is to refuse *both* the fetishization of difference *and* the dangerous hegemonies of identification and conflation.

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[14] Steven T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Religious Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

[15] Mark J. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[16] Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (1995; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). The critical literature around this text is extensive. For my responses, see www.rice.edu/kalischild and the following texts, some of which are available on the same Web site: "Teaching Hindu Tantrism with Freud: Psychoanalysis as Critical Theory and Mystical Technique," in *Teaching Freud*, ed. Diane Jonte-Pace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); "The Tantric Truth of the Matter: A Forthright Response to Rajiv Malhotra," www.sulekha.com (posted September 12, 2002); "Sexuality, Textuality, and the Future of the Past: A Response to Swami Tyagananda," *Evam* 1.1–2 (2002); "Secret Talk: Sexual Identity and the Politics of Scholarship in the Study of Hindu Tantrism," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 29.4 (winter 2001); "A Garland of Talking Heads for the Goddess: Some Autobiographical and Psychoanalytic Reflections on the Western Kali," in *Is the Goddess a Feminist? The Politics of South Asian Goddesses*, ed. Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl (New York: New York University Press, 2000); "Pale Plausibilities," preface to *Kali's Child*, 1998; "Mystical Homoeroticism, Reductionism, and the Reality of Censorship: A Reply to Gerald James Larson," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66.3 (fall 1988): 627–35. Various portions of my *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), particularly the autobiographical essays, can also be read as implicit reflections on the controversy.

Ramakrishna: Colonialism, Universalism, Mysticism

My prime example of deep cross-cultural communication and cross-religious transgression is that of the nineteenth-century Bengali Shakta mystic and Hindu saint, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. I could turn to other remarkable Indian figures for similar reminders of the fluidity of culture and the mystical denial of religious difference. The fifteenth-century devotional poet Kabir, for example, sang of a God beyond all Muslim, Hindu, ritual, and caste differences. Guru Nanak (1469–1539) envisioned a God who united Muslim and Hindu in a monotheistic mystical theology that would recognize neither caste nor race and would soon develop into a new religion called Sikhism. Perhaps most spectacularly, we could also turn to the Mughal emperor Akbar, whose Sufi sensibility inspired him to create a small college of comparative religion at his court and to establish in 1582 a new universal religion later dubbed (by his critics) the

Divine Faith (*Din-i-Ilahi*). To this same end, Akbar commissioned translations of classical Hindu scriptural texts, and invited Sufi shaiks, Sunni ulama, Hindu pandits, Zoroastrian and Parsi scholars, Jains, and even Catholic priests from Goa to argue their points together in his presence. Akbar's Sufi experiment with religious difference would die with his great-grandson, Dara Shikoh (1514–59), who was accused of heresy by orthodox Muslims and executed for, among other political reasons, his embrace of mystical doctrines. Indian history would have to wait another century and a half before this vision was picked up again and developed into a distinctly modern or comparative way of looking at religion. That place and time was nineteenth-century Bengal. The religious context of this new experiment was again a distinctly mystical and unorthodox one, carried on in a social environment imbued with debate and reform inspired by the dominating presence of Western religious and social thought.

Ramakrishna was born in 1836 to a poor family in a rural district and grew up in a very traditional, very orthodox Brahmin household.[17] His father died when the boy was six or seven. Soon Ramakrishna began falling into strange trances, which others interpreted as a sign of precocious religious abilities, and he began as well to entertain fantasies of being reborn as a girl. When his eldest brother, Ramkumar, moved to Calcutta, the British colonial capital, in an attempt to rescue the family from destitution, Ramakrishna joined him. They found work in the new Dakshineshwar temple, dedicated to the Tantric goddess Kali, north of the city. Ramkumar, however, soon died. Ramakrishna responded to this second major loss in the same way he had responded to his father's death—with trance and vision. A period of intense emotional suffering followed. Desperately seeking a vision of Kali as Ma (or "Mom") and frustrated with his visionary failures, Ramakrishna reached for a sword to cut his throat (the ritual sword used to decapitate goats offered to the goddess). But Kali intervened and submerged the young priest in an ocean of radiance and bliss: this was to be the first of hundreds of ecstatic unions that would become a defining feature of Ramakrishna's sanctity and fame. Even as an adult, he experienced himself (and was perceived by others) as a child of the goddess.

Over the next few years, Ramakrishna would pursue a remarkable religious experiment, worshipping and identifying with in turn a broad range of deities and experiencing the altered states of consciousness that they brought upon him. Within the broad and generous Hindu fold, for example, he engaged in Vaishnava, Shakta, and Advaita Vedantic *sadhanas* (spiritual disciplines). Or as he put it himself, he practiced and thought "according to the Puranas," "according to the Tantras," and "according to the Vedas," three classes of Hindu scripture that represent the ways of theistic devotion, erotic transgression, and philosophical deconstruction, respectively (and very roughly). A series of gurus filed through the temple in these years, guiding, prodding, encouraging, sometimes forcing Ramakrishna through various rituals and meditative practices. The young priest, for example, "became" Hanuman, the monkey god and paradigmatic devotee of Rama, and ecstatically sang to the beautiful blue god Krishna, often as the latter's female lover, Radha, "according to the Puranas." He cross-dressed as a handmaid of Kali's for a full year, in effect becoming a woman in order to conquer *kama* or sexual desire.[18] He would also practice versions of the Five M's, the five forbidden substances and antinomian acts that are ritually engaged in Shakta Tantric practice, and he learned of other mystico-erotic techniques with his female Tantric guru and the many local Tantric sects "according to the Tantras." Then he denied the existence of these same gods and goddesses in order to meditate on the formless *brahman* "according to the Vedas," under the tutelage of Tota Puri, a naked wandering alchemist and ascetic whose departure (or presence—it is not clear which) sent the young priest into a dangerous six-month trance that is celebrated as exemplifying the pinnacle of yoga ("enstatic absorption without trace" or *nirvikalpa samadhi*).

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[17] Technically speaking, Ramakrishna was not his birth name, but it is the name by which he was known in his own adult life and in subsequent generations.

Ramakrishna also came to experiment with Islam and Christianity before settling into life, within the temple precincts, as a teaching guru and local saint. With a Hindu convert to Sufism named Gobinda Ray, who expressed his faith in secret and may not have been a practicing Muslim, Ramakrishna took up Islam.[19] He repeated the name of Allah, wore Muslim clothes, prayed the daily Muslim prayers, and even refused to visit the Hindu deities. After three days of this discipline, it is said that he underwent a vision of a brilliant human figure with a long beard (that is, a male) and then merged into "the Fourth" state of the unconditioned *brahman*.

Perhaps because the presence of Christianity was more salient than Islam and much more problematic in colonial Bengal, biographers generally concentrate on Ramakrishna's Christian practices. They tell us, for example, that he often visited a friend who would read him passages from the Bible and that on the friend's wall hung an image of the Infant Jesus with the Virgin Mary (that is, another child/mother goddess icon). One day, we are told, the picture came alive and a ray of light issued from it and entered Ramakrishna's body. Another transformation had begun, this one centered on what a biographer terms the "Jesus state" (*jisu-bhava*). In a different version of the story, a foreign man of fair complexion approached Ramakrishna and identified himself as Jesus, "he who gave his heart's blood in order to save humanity from suffering and pain and who endured death at the hands of men, he is one with the Lord, the greatest *yogi*, the loving Jesus Christ!" (*LP* 2.21.3). Jesus then embraced Ramakrishna and disappeared into his body.

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[18] Mahendranath Gupta, *Srisriramakrsnakathamrta*, 31st ed., 5 vols. (Calcutta: Kathamrita Bhavana, 1987), 5:140. This five-volume text, known to Bengalis simply as the *Kathamrita* or *Nectar Talk*, is based on diary notes that Gupta kept between 1882 and 1886. Its thirteen hundred pages constitute our best historical source for Ramakrishna's mature teachings. I will cite it henceforth as *KA*, followed by the volume and page number, in the body of the text.

[19] "Gobinda" (Sanskrit Govinda) is a name for Krishna. See Ram Chandra Datta, *Srisriramakrsna Paramahamsadever Jivanavrttanta*, 5th ed. (Calcutta: Jogodyan, Kakurgachi, 1935), 54; henceforth cited as *JV*. In Datta's account, the man's name is Gobinda Das. As for his conversion to Islam: "We cannot say how far he used to follow its social rules and customs" (Swami Saradananda, *Srisriramakrsnalilaprasanga* [Calcutta: Udbodhan Karjalay, 1986], 2.16.9 [bk. 2, chap. 16, sec. 9]); henceforth cited as *LP*.

Partly as a result of these comparative experiments and the ecumenical teachings that would soon flow from them, admiring visitors and students began arriving at the Kali temple. From the mid-1870s through the mid-1880s, an impressive community of disciples formed around Ramakrishna, and the expression "Hindu saint" came to be applied.[20] Disciples learned from him about the many paths of various religions (or mental conditionings) leading to the same goal and debated whether Ramakrishna was an avatar or "incarnation of God." In 1886 he died of throat cancer after a long battle with the disease and passed into what the tradition calls "the great union" (*mahasamadhi*) beyond and beneath all local colors—into that level of being, consciousness, and bliss about which nothing can be said (*KA* 5:151).

Doctrinal Analysis

After his practices according to the Puranas, according to the Tantras, according to the Vedas, and according to Islam and Christianity, Ramakrishna eventually settled down into the more stable role of guru and began to develop the implications of his previous experiments through a series of memorable metaphors. In a series of fascinating appendixes that dialectically alternate between Ramakrishna's Bengali teachings and Swami Vivekananda's English lectures, Gupta nicely summarizes this comparative mystics and links it to the guru's primary disciple and the latter's famous missionary efforts in America and Europe, where he helped found numerous Vedanta Centers and prepared the cultural ground for the hundreds of Hindu and Buddhist missionaries that would soon follow his successful example. "We have drawn from our diary these conversations on the harmony of all religions [*sarva-dharma-samanvaya*]," Gupta writes (*KA* 5:161). As a way of focusing our discussion, I will in turn draw on Gupta's appendixes.

To my knowledge, a long technical expression like "the harmony of all reli-

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20. The first appearance of the expression in print was in a local English newspaper: "A Hindu Saint," *Indian Mirror*, March 28, 1875.

gions" never appears in Ramakrishna's mouth, at least not in Gupta's central text. The saint's *katha* or "talk" as recorded there was pithy and catchy: his famous *mata-patha* was a kind of sound-bite, meaning something like "perspective-path," or "as one's view, so one's religious practice." This same *mata-patha* doctrine is usually taken as the essence of Ramakrishna's teaching, and many metaphors of his do point to this basic conviction. In a teaching adapted from the Upanisads, he would liken the religions of the world to different rivers of the land, which flow finally into the same ocean. Or he would compare the social reality of religious difference to a pond to which Hindus, Muslims, and Christians all go to obtain water. Whereas Hindus call what they draw out *jal* and Muslims call it *pani*, British Christians call it "water," but it is all the same fluid. Ramakrishna thus insisted on the relativity of the terms, practices, and beliefs that constitute religions and customs (*dharma)*: these were means toward a common end—culturally relative descriptions of a universal ground (or better here, liquid). The means should not be confused with that end, ocean, or pond.

Ramakrishna's teaching is, however, not as simple as is generally assumed. While he taught that "all religions are true" (*KA* 1:161), he did not confuse truth with God. "Religion itself is not God," he said, though "it is possible to get to God through various religions" (*KA* 1:161). By "true," then, he did not mean "without error"; on the contrary, he was clear that all religions err, just as no one's watch perfectly reflects the sun's movement (*KA* 1:162). By "true," he most likely meant "effective" or "conducive to the experience of God." Moreover, despite his own experimentation, he consistently taught that it is best to stay with one path or religion; people can reach the same roof by different means (stairs, ladder, rope), but no person can use two means at the same time (*KA* 5:161). Still, one must never imagine that the necessity (whether cultural or psychological) of following a single path renders that path singular. One must never make the mistake of thinking that one's own path is the only possible or effective way to the common roof and its grand vista. Ramakrishna thus stood solidly against what the Bengali text calls *matuyar buddhi*, which Gupta (and it is probably his term rather than Ramakrishna's) glosses in English to mean "Dogmatism" (*KA* 5:162).

It is also important to realize that Ramakrishna's tendency to compare religions did not prevent him from criticizing positions that he found dubious or dysfunctional in one religion or another. He was particularly hard on the orthodox Vaishnavas and the Christians,[21] whose respective doctrines of sin struck him as useless and ultimately destructive.[22] He would thus quote approvingly his

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[21] *KA* 2:22; 2:94–95; 3:40; 4:170; 5:82; 5:86; 5:92; 5:124. Shaktas can also be bigoted (*KA* 5:73). This attitude was shared by Ramakrishna's disciples. Saradananda, for example, describes the Vaishnavas as "fault-finders" (*LP* 4.3.39) and "of low-caste" (*LP* 4.3.32).

[22] For Ramakrishna's criticism of Christianity's excessive concern with sin, see *KA* 1:45–46; 1:153; 5:11; 5:111; 5:173. For his criticism of the Vaishnava fixation on sin, see *KA* 4:166; 5:22; 5:43.

Tantric friend, Vaishnavacharan: “Why do you only talk about ‘sin’ and more ‘sin’? Be blissful” (*KA* 5:41). Atheists, Tantrikas, and Brahmos also received their share of Ramakrishna’s disdain. His attacks on atheists are particularly interesting, for those he refers to were in fact Brahmos (*JU* 102) and Vedantins (*JU* 62). In one scene, for example, an “atheist” has left, and Ramakrishna tells disciples to throw the bed the man sat on in the river and sprinkle the room with Ganges water. Both Saradananda and Datta, moreover, record scenes in which Ramakrishna describes a group of meditating Brahmos, those famous social and religious reformers of nineteenth-century Bengal, as “a troop of monkeys” (*LP* 5.1.1.6; *JV* 5, 72), acting out a religious practice for which they have no ability or promise. His treatment of Tantrikas was not always much better, even if it was generally less expensive in terms of beds. He seems in these passages content simply to ridicule (*KA* 2:142) or make fun (*KA* 2:141) of those “branded thieves” (*KA* 3:52).

Obviously, then, Ramakrishna’s comparative mystics cannot be accurately represented as the simple ecumenism or universalism that it is usually understood to be. Combining a remarkable appreciation of diverse religious systems and a critical edge derived from his own Hindu sensibilities, he developed a sophisticated dialectical ontology that allowed for both appreciation *and* critique. The ontology is fundamental. What is the ocean into which all rivers empty, the water about which all languages speak, the roof up to which all passageways lead, or the sun that all timepieces erringly follow? Ramakrishna is maddeningly complex on these questions; and commentators, myself included, have argued for over a century about his answers. In my own understanding, Ramakrishna generally rejected the *mayavada* or “doctrine of illusion” of Advaita Vedanta, preferring instead to see the phenomenal world as a physical embodiment of the divine. *Tinii sab hoechen*, [She herself (or He himself) has become everything], he often taught. Hence the world could be called a “matting of illusion” only in the middle stage of spiritual practice; further down the path, one would learn to see the phenomenal world as a “mansion of fun” in which to take delight in the omnipresence and essential bliss of the divine. This was the “dialectical *gnosis*” (*vijnana*) of the Hindu Tantra that embraced both transcendent Consciousness (the god Shiva) and immanent Energy (the goddess Sakti) as ontologically bound or—more traditionally, in iconography and meditation—sexually united.

Still within this same erotic, bipolar, or dialectical *gnosis*, Ramakrishna was enamored of the tradition of Ramprasad, an eighteenth-century Shakta poet whose lyrics were constantly on Ramakrishna’s lips and who famously sang that he had no desire to become sugar but would rather taste its sweetness. So too, Ramakrishna much preferred the sweet states of divine-human encounter—devotion (*bhakti*) and love (*prema*)—over the metaphysical absolutes of *nirvana* and *brahman*, though he recognized these latter as fundamental dimensions of the divine pleroma.[23] He would sometimes make this case in terms of the traditional categories of form (*sakara*) and formlessness (*nirakara*): the formless waters of consciousness take on distinct forms through the freezing force of devotion and are melted by the hot "sun of *gnosis* of *brahman*" (*KA* 5:170–71). He did not, then, simply recognize devotional differences. He preferred them, even as he recognized that only *brahman* is absolute.

Still another approach to this point—the approach taken in Vivekananda's English lectures as quoted in these same appendixes—is by way of the modern category of experience.[24] Here, the argument is that differences in doctrine flow at least partly from psychological differences and the stunningly various subjective experiences that individuals have had of the divine. The bottom line is personal religious experience, to which Ramakrishna referred in Bengali as *anubhava* (experience or experiential replication), *bhava* (state, mood, mode of being, ecstasy, or spiritual orientation), *isvaradarsana* (vision of God), or *isvaralabha* (attainment of God). Vivekananda and the English commentators tend to translate these terms as "spirituality" (*KA* 5:156), the "realization of God" (*KA* 5:157), or simply "these experiences" (*KA* 5:159). When Ramakrishna or Vivekananda, then, claims that "all religions are true," he is asserting that all religions provide effective means to experience subjectively and directly the divine ground of all religions. As Vivekananda writes: "Religion does not consist in doctrines or dogmas. . . . The end of all religions is the realization of God in the soul. Ideals and methods may differ but that is the central point" (*KA* 5:156). With this logic, one religion has no grounds on which to accuse another of malpractice—of "idolatry": "If a man can realize his divine nature most easily with the help of an image, would it be right to call it a sin?" (*KA* 5:172). Furthermore, "if one creed alone were to be true and all the others untrue, you would have again to say that religion is diseased. If one religion is true, all the others must be true. Thus the Hindu religion is your property as well as mine" (*KA* 5:153). In the end, it is experience, and not creed, that matters.

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[23] For a detailed study of Ramakrishna's embrace of this Tantric ontology, see Kripal, "Kali on Top of Siva: Tantra and Vedanta in Ramakrishna's Teachings and Mystical Experiences," in *Kali's Child*, chap. 3.

[24] It is common these days to read in poststructuralist scholarship that the categories of "experience" or "mystical experience" are modern psychological constructions and as such reflect primarily modern anxieties about the self, about the collapse of traditional authority, and about the need for an alternative locus of truth. There is some validity to this argument, but if we want to see, as I do, the relationship of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda as representing roughly the Hindu tradition's passage from a premodern worldview to a modern one, we must also admit that there is more than a little of the premodern in the modern and that "experience" is a perfectly fine term to describe the centerpiece of Ramakrishna's traditional teachings. The constructionist case, in other words, although otherwise valuable, is also overstated and itself needs to be deconstructed as flowing from a modern relativist epistemology that is simply not shared by much of mystical literature, the Bengali *Kathamrita* included.

A More Historical and Critical View

It is necessary now to step back from hagiography and the canonical tradition in order to better understand Ramakrishna's experiments with Hindu, Muslim, and Christian devotion and to isolate aspects that may be applicable in other times and contexts. The canonical reading of his comparative experiments grounds them in a form of Advaita Vedanta or, perhaps, neo-Vedanta that Vivekananda privileged in his lectures as the orthodox hermeneutic for reading his guru's life and as the basis for his own social reforms. However, there is little, if any, historical precedent in India for grounding either a universal ecumenism like Ramakrishna's or a social consciousness like Vivekananda's in classical Advaita Vedanta; quite the contrary, this particular philosophical tradition has historically been quite polemical toward competing religious visions and has been fundamentally ascetic in its attitude toward the social world, which it generally seeks to renounce along Indian lines rather than reform along Western lines.[25] We need to look elsewhere for the immediate sources of Ramakrishna's comparative practices.

Those immediate (Bengali) sources are Hindu and Tantric. Ramakrishna's teachings were part of a long Shakta tradition that drew on ancient tendencies in Indian thought to relativize opposing beliefs and traditions by including them in a more encompassing hierarchical framework. Ramakrishna was fully aware of this legacy when he paraphrased the *Rg Veda* to support his own position: "The Lord is one, though his names are many" (*KA* 5:14). But while this legacy was ancient, the manner in which Ramakrishna appropriated it owed much to more contemporary influences, especially the Bengali Shakta tradition and its poet-singers. Thus, his Shakta reworking of the ancient Vedic ideal: "The Power [*sakti*] is one, its names are many" (*JV* 91). For example, Ramprasad in the eighteenth century sang to his unkempt Kali as the essence of all the gods and goddesses: "Kali, Krishna, Shiva, and Rama—they are all my Wild-Haired One."[26] He sang as well of the "madhouse" of the world where "Jesus, Moses, and Caitanya were unconscious in the ecstasy of love."[27] That Shakta poets such as Ramprasad saw Kali as the actress behind the world's religious masks suggests that, even in his universalism, Ramakrishna was a Shakta, a child of the goddess. The same lesson could be learned by considering this version of his *mata-patha* doctrine: "There are as many paths as there are opinions. All religions are true, just as the Kali Temple can be reached by different paths" (*KA* 5:161).[28] Where the paths lead, it seems, is as important as their obvious number. They are all "true," after all, because they all lead to the same place—to the goddess. Again: "That which the Vedas call Parabrahman, he calls Kali. He whom the Muslims call Allah and the Christians call God, he calls Kali" (*KA* 1:236). This is she "who makes love to Shiva," the latter being the formless *brahman* (*KA* 5:170). Even Ramakrishna's canonical biographer, Swami Saradananda, acknowledges the Shakta roots of Ramakrishna's universalism by asserting that it was Kali who "produced in his mind the liberal faith, 'as many faiths so many paths.' "[29] There is, then, something profoundly Tantric—and thus context-specific—about Ramakrishna's universalism. It is hardly the blissful but abstract *brahman* of Vivekananda, his most famous expositor. The universal ground of Ramakrishna is closer to the midnight darkness where "black forms blend with one another" and "all jackals howl in the same way" (*LP* 4.4.30).[30]

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[25] For a summary of the critical literature on the relationship between traditional Advaita Vedanta and Vivekananda's social ethics, see Kripal, "Seeing Inside and Outside the Goddess: The Mystical and the Ethical in the Teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda," in *Crossing Boundaries: Essays on the Ethical Status of Mysticism*, ed. George William Barnard and Kripal (New York: Seven Bridges, 2002), 230–64.

[26] Quoted in Shashibhushan Dasgupta, *Bharater Saktisadhana o Sakti Sahitya* (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 1985), 264.

[27] Jadunath Sinha, *The Cult of Shakti: Rama Prasada's Devotional Songs* (Calcutta: Jadunath Sinha Foundation, 1981), no. 139.

The Shakta nature of this spirituality is "deeper," more "inward," than its common Shaiva or Vaishnava expressions. As a popular Bengali proverb puts it, "inside a Shakta, outside a Shaiva, on the mouth Hari, Hari," which might be paraphrased: "Speak as a devotee of Krishna and act like a devotee of Shiva in public, but in your heart worship the goddess as a Shakta."[31] The Shakta nature of Ramakrishna's experiments also becomes evident when we notice that he consistently prays to Kali before taking up any foreign path; he asks for her permission and also prays to her while engaged in foreign practices. Early (and largely ignored) biographers such as Satyacharan Mitra are clear about Ramakrishna's Shakta orientation: "Ramakrishna Paramahamsa practiced according to many teachings, but the view of the Tantras was his primary view. He was really in the tradition of the Tantras! He obtain[ed] the supernormal powers [*siddhi*]. This *sadhana* was the marrow of his *sadhana*'s body" (*JU* 72).[32] Mitra also tells us that Ramakrishna saw and understood the "Kali-state [*Kali-bhava*], not the Krishna-, Rama- or Shiva-states" (*JU* 61). According to such early observers, Ramakrishna's universalism was an expression of his Shaktism; the neo-Vedantic reading of Vivekananda and the canonical tradition come later.[33]

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[28] The expression is usually quoted in its more complete form *yata-mata-tata-patha* (as one's perspective, so one's path). In the *Kathamrita*, however, Ramakrishna usually uses his shorter version, *mata-patha* (*KA* 2:143; 3:41; 3:144; 4:135; 5:21; 5:39; 5:161; 5:211).

[29] *LP* 4.4.47; 4.4.50; 4.4.54.

[30] "Black forms blend": Sinha, *Cult of Shakti*, no. 170.

[31] Satyacharan Mitra, *Sri Ramakrisna Paramahamsa—Jivana o Upadesa* (Calcutta: Great Indian Press, 1897), 169; henceforth cited as *JU*.

[32] Mitra's clear preference for a Tantric reading of Ramakrishna is most likely due, among other things, to his primary oral source for the biography: a certain Damaru Mahimcandra Nakulabadhut, a "special friend of Ramakrishna" whom Mitra describes as a Tantrika. "Half this book I wrote listening to him" (*JU* ii).

[33] The canonical biographers and even most of the later scholarship have thus more or less ignored Shakta texts like Mitra's, which will focus much of my discussion here. A recent happy exception is Rajagopal Chattapadhyaya, *Sriramakrsna: Harano Katha* [Sri Ramakrishna: Lost conversations] (Calcutta: Sribalaram Prakashani, 2003).

Ramakrishna's own visions often follow the same pattern. He was reported as seeing Kali in the form of a disciple's mother, a woman whom he described as an orthodox and closed-minded Vaishnava.[34] The woman's Vaishnavism and bigotry are superficial. "Inside" she is a Shakta, indeed the goddess incarnate, despite her outward or surface Vaishnava self-understanding. The same logic is at work in another scene, this one recorded in Mitra's *Jivana o Upadesa* (*JU* 145–46). "At this time," Mitra tells us, "the big [Christian] preachers of Calcutta were going with Keshab Chandra Sen to see Ramakrishna." The scene is thus set in a context of confrontation. Mitra opens the story by relating how a guileless Englishman named William told Ramakrishna that "Jesus showed us many miraculous things." Then William asked: "Can you show us any?" In the *Kathamrita* scenes, Ramakrishna is quite clear about his inability to perform such feats, but here Mitra has him obliging his Christian inquirer in spectacular fashion. Ramakrishna asks William to "come and see my Kali-Ma from a distance just once." When William obliges his host, he is amazed to see that the image of Jesus appeared in the place of the Kali image. After this display, Ramakrishna asks the astounded Christian, "How is that? Did you not see that my Kali is who your Jesus Christ is?" The scene ends with William grabbing Ramakrishna's feet—an act of humble devotion—and taking up the Hindu "*dharma* of renunciation" somewhere in the mountains. William's taking refuge at Ramakrishna's feet is the ritual expression of what amounts to a conversion story: the story of a conversion from Christianity to Hinduism. Once again, the Shakta goddess is the focus of confrontation and symbolic resolution. She dissolves religious forms into their deeper (Tantric) energies.

Alongside these Tantric visionary resolutions of religious difference we can also easily detect a set of indigenous "deconstructive" techniques that function to melt down the stiff boundaries between all the gods and goddesses into a deeper and more fluid unity, and here the debt to Advaita Vedanta is a real one. Ramakrishna may have found these apophatic techniques too dry or boring for his own personal devotional tastes, but this does not mean that he dismissed them as unimportant. Quite the contrary, in numerous places in the Bengali texts, Ramakrishna's metaphors and teachings employ a kind of deconstruction, suggesting in effect that all religious beliefs or attitudes are products of the environment and the mind's ability to take on the "color" or "dye" of its immediate surroundings: "The mind takes on the color of whatever color it is dyed in. The mind is the cloth of the dyer's room" (*KA* 5:119). Hence if one meditates on God, the mind takes on the colors, as it were, of God, and if one engages in worldly activities, the mind changes accordingly. What we have here, in other words, is a metaphorical understanding of what we would today call constructionism. What separates Ramakrishna's constructionism, however, from most contemporary forms is that he saw a deeper "mind" or "heart" (*mana*) beneath all of these "colorful" constructions, a mind-heart that was in turn ultimately rooted in the nature of a universal consciousness (*cit* or *brahman*) that transcends and undergirds all forms of human culture and religion.

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[34] This woman, for example, was deeply offended when Ramakrishna ate Kali's ritual offering, and she quit coming to see him (*KA* 5:92).

The Western Catalyst

In accounting for Ramakrishna's religious universalism, we must add to the Tantric and Advaita Vedantic influences on him a distinctively Western catalyst, effective for some decades in Bengal. Stimulated by strands of Western social and religious thought, and also by Islam, Rammohun Roy, a Bengali reformer (often called "the father of modern India"), argued that Hinduism had in the time of the Upanishads experienced a golden age of monotheism that had since been corrupted by polytheist practices. In 1828 Roy instituted a Society of Brahman that would function as a monotheistic religion for middle-class, English-educated Indians and serve as their reply to Christian condescension. Roy's brand of Brahmoism displays real similarities (and some later historical connections) to Christianity, and especially to Unitarianism, which was developing in Boston at roughly this same time. Satyacharan Mitra, for example, writing in 1896, suggested that the "state" or "mood" (*bhava*) of the Brahmos was the "Christ-*bhava*" (*JU* 87). Though Roy's advent as a Hindu reformer is said to have put fear in the hearts of Christians (*JU* 107), it is clear that Western Transcendentalists and Unitarians found in Roy's religion an exemplar of their own faith, one of the most impressive before Ramakrishna. Mitra, for example, insisted that the influence of Roy and other Brahmo monotheists on Ramakrisha was immense and that the Brahmo teachings had in fact inspired Ramakrishna's own "practice of all the religions" (*JU* 108).[35]

This seemingly obvious connection between Brahmo universalism and Ramakrishna's religious experiments gave rise to a very long controversy between the Brahmos and Ramakrishna's followers over who influenced whom. Keshab Sen (a leader in the Society of Brahman, who broke away to found his own group) so identified Christianity with religious authority that he claimed Ramakrishna was a reincarnation of John the Baptist (a claim that implicitly identified himself as the new messiah) (*KA* 2:102). The textual evidence, however, is far more humble, even as it affirms Mitra's observation that Ramakrishna was affected by Roy and Christianity, although Ramakrishna was, as I have already observed, resistant as well as open to non-Hindu religious forms. Keshab, it turns out, was sometimes more open to the religious "other" than Ramakrishna was. Ramakrishna, for example, actually pressed Keshab to return, late in life, to "the names of Hari and Ma" (*KA* 4:239).[36] As for himself, Keshab had set up an impressive academic program in which he assigned disciples to prolonged textual study of various religious traditions in original languages, a much more extensive version of Ramakrishna's simpler, if more famous, comparative experiments.[37] While the Brahmos and the Calcutta culture they did so much to form provided the context for Ramakrishna's experimental universalism, he himself led the Brahmos from their "Christ-*bhava*" and its social gospel back to the "Mother-*bhava*" and worship of the goddess (*JU* 87). This implicit rejection of Brahmo universalism for a more traditional Hindu identity appears again in a story about the Brahmo whom Ramakrishna converted: "He left the Brahmo Society and practiced *sadhana* according to the Hindu way" (*JU* 94). It was later canonical interpreters who identified Ramakrishna's inclusivism and religious tolerance as the primary reason he had "descended" into the world as the modern incarnation of God (*avatara*). He came to combine the Hindu, Christian, and Muslim into a single harmonious community in the very center of all the world's religions, even if that center was already an unstable one.

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[35] "If Raja Ram Mohun Roy would not have come, we wouldn't have such a sweet Ramakrishna-*bhava*" (*JU* 82).

Ramakrishna and the Comparativist

The modern comparative study of religion cannot be reduced to a ritual repetition of Ramakrishna's visionary explorations. Historically, his Indian experiments were products of the same broad global forces that resulted in the earlier Indian experiments of Rammohun Roy, Keshab Sen, and the Brahmo Society, and of the earlier and simultaneous Western phenomena of European and English Romanticism, American Transcendentalism, the Theosophical Society (founded in 1875 in New York), the grand comparative theorizing and cross-cultural editing of Max Müller and his *Sacred Books of the East* translation series, and the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. (Significantly, it was this last event that more or less created the fame and public persona of Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna's missionary to the West.) As for the sense that all religions share a common core, that was a very old idea, first clearly articulated in Europe in 1540 by Agostino Steuco in line with the neo-Platonism of Marsilio Ficino. Ficino held, Steuco believed (but the words here are Sedgwick's), that "all religions shared a common origin in a single perennial (or primeval or primordial) religion that had subsequently taken a variety of forms, including the Zoroastrian, Pharaonic, Platonic, and Christian."[38] Thus what I am calling comparative mystics and modernity were born together in the West, interestingly at the same time that they were being similarly explored in north India at the court of Akbar.

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[36] See also *JU* 88–89. For Keshab's experiments with non-Hindu religious traditions, see David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), chap. 9.

[37] Kopf, *Brahmo Samaj*, 267, 281–86.

The European project would crash on the rocks of historical criticism: in 1614 Isaac Casaubon showed persuasively that the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which perennialists read as a Mosaic text prophetic of their own Christian-Platonic synthesis, had been written centuries after Platonism and Christianity became established worldviews.[39] For the next century and a half, perennialism would linger, surviving in French Masonic lodges, before its renewal in an explicit linkage with Hindu inclusivism. This move was announced first in 1799 when Reuben Burrow connected Hinduism, Hermes, and Moses in a deeply eccentric essay in *Asiatick Researches*, the journal of the Asiatick Society of Bengal, which had done much to introduce India to the West.[40] That Indo-Hermetic-Mosaic synthesis (Sedgwick terms it a "Vedanta Perennialism") is still with us. For our present purposes, perhaps what matters is that this stream is the one into which Mircea Eliade waded (he wrote his M.A. thesis on Ficino and his Ph.D. dissertation on the "mysticism" of yoga) in order to create space for a modern study of religion that is neither answerable to Christian (or any other) theology nor quite reducible to the social sciences. Eliade, in other words, did more than any other comparativist to transform perennialism into scholarship and a new way of thinking about religion.[41]

Obviously, we are not dealing here with a cause-and-effect relationship or a debate over what culture created which; rather, we are dealing with a shared global history and a set of verisimilar responses. Still, it is also the case that the legacy of Ramakrishna in the history of religious studies is both originary and intimate. Max Müller, the founding father, or perhaps grandfather, of comparative religion, for example, corresponded with Vivekananda and wrote the first English biography of Ramakrishna, though it would take nearly a hundred years for Müller's historical-critical questions and doubts about the hagiographical tradition to be taken seriously.[42] The second major Western biography was written by Romain Rolland, the Nobel laureate in literature, who initiated the psychoanalytic theory of mysticism by sending his dual biographies of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda to Sigmund Freud.[43] A bit later, a young Joseph Campbell would help Swami Nikhilananda edit his 1942 English translation of the *Kathamrta*, the now-classic *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*; and Campbell would, moreover, make Ramakrishna's Shakta Tantra the teleological summation of Indian philosophy in his ghostwriting of Heinrich Zimmer's influential *Philosophies of India*. Little wonder, then, that to this day Ramakrishna's presence is invoked as exemplary of a type of spiritual pluralism championed by a wide range of popular writers and practitioners. He has been a presence in American religious history for well over a century.

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[38] Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 24. Sedgwick describes Steuco as "a Vatican librarian and Christian Platonist, author of *De perenni philosophia* [Concerning the perennial philosophy], 1540, dedicated to Pope Paul III" (*Against the Modern World*, 274 n. 11).

[39] Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 41.

[40] Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 41–42.

[41] I am indebted to Sedgwick for this line of thought.

[42] Friedrich Max Müller, *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings* (London: Longmans, 1898).

Perhaps, then, I can be forgiven for taking Ramakrishna's experiments as an archetype of the kind of comparative mystics that denies the ultimacy of cultural and ethnic differences while celebrating their psychological necessity. (It is more usual to take his comparative experiments as an ambiguous textual complexity to unravel using historical-critical and psychological methods or else as the last word on the relationship of world religions.) Ramakrishna's variety of comparative mystics, moreover, grounds both denial and celebration in an ontology of human being (however defined). Every one of Ramakrishna's archetypal experiments (with the various theistic traditions of Hinduism, with Advaita Vedanta, with Tantra, with Christianity, and with Islam) possesses fantastically rich and elaborate histories in Western scholarship. His Shiva, Krishna, and Kali, for example, have each enjoyed a long history of engagement and hermeneutical encounter with Indology, and even a sort of intellectual devotion. Moreover, scholarly work on Hindu-Christian and Hindu-Muslim relations has deepened in insight as volume after volume has appeared on the violent injustices of British colonialism in India, on various Christian and Hindu experiments in dialogue and global theology, on the rich history of Sufism in India as a mediating force between Islam and Hinduism, and on the historical, structural, and psychological animosity that has defined relations between Hindus and Muslims and, to a lesser extent, Hindus and Christians in historical and contemporary India. Modern historical-critical scholarship has arrived at some new answers to all of these questions and cannot finally agree with Ramakrishna's belief that "all paths lead to the same goal." Yet scholars have nevertheless chosen to engage all of the religious forms represented in Ramakrishna's archetypal experiments. The saint may not always convince us with his particular metaphysical solutions, but he knew where the problems lay (and still lie), and he was not afraid to confront them head on as specifically problems of religion.

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[43] For this remarkable story and an in-depth analysis, see William B. Parsons, *The Enigma of the Oceanic Feeling: Revisioning the Psychoanalytic Theory of Mysticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

The Critical Study of Religion as a Modern Mystical Tradition

The origins of the discipline of religious studies in nineteenth-century Europe are not primarily mystical or even religious. A highly developed secular sense is a sine qua non of the discipline and its social sustainability anywhere on the planet (hence its virtual absence outside the Western academy). I would like, though, to make a restricted and heterodox case that regarding the discipline as a modern mystical tradition could be useful in approaching the constructive tasks under discussion in this symposium. I am not suggesting that the discipline must or even should be read in this way. Rather, I wish to make the more restricted, but no less unorthodox, case that some of the discipline's practices and practitioners—those capable of forging a mystical-critical practice out of the discipline's dual Romantic/Enlightenment heritage—*can* be read in this way. Moreover, a mystical-critical rereading of the discipline might be useful for the constructive tasks under discussion here: namely, the cross-cultural influence of religious systems in pursuit of a safer, more humane, and more religiously satisfying world. The paper preceding mine (Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's) says that cross-cultural exchange—involving "ontological predation"—is dangerous and a business for shamans only. The contribution succeeding mine (Tobie Nathan's) suggests that reconciliation among world religions will come when that achievement is in the hands of "strange human beings" who love their "neighbor's god." The contexts of those statements—the Amerindian Amazon and a visionary "parliament of gods"—render them metaphorical for our present purposes. I intend to gloss those metaphors as a clue and a practical invitation.

Scholars of religion, it turns out, often have profound religious experiences reading and interpreting the texts they critically study, and these events have consequences for the methods and models they develop, the conclusions they come to, and even the traditions they study.[44] Given what is often personally, professionally, and religiously at stake in these events, it perhaps should not surprise us that such writers commonly hide these secret (*mustikos*) experiences from their peers and readers through a variety of rhetorical and esoteric strategies. Historians of religions, in other words, are often closet mystics, if we allow ourselves to redefine *mystic* in an untraditional—that is, modern—way.

Steven Wasserstrom has recently substantiated a thesis of this kind with respect to Eliade, Henri Corbin, and Gershom Scholem, three giants in the field.[45] Eliade hinted that he had stepped "out of space and time" while studying yoga as a young Indologist and had later camouflaged his mystical experiences in a supernatural novella about the *siddhi* or superpower of invisibility.[46] Scholem too "longed for mystical experience"[47] and spoke of his own "genius" as an "inner compass," like Socrates' *daimonion*, that guided his spiritual quest.[48] Scholem saw his massive scholarly output in mystical terms, as the expression of a desire to penetrate "through the wall of history" and "into the essence of things."[49] But the atemporal mystical truth, "whose existence disappears particularly when it is projected into historical time," became visible for Scholem solely in "the legitimate discipline of commentary and in the singular mirror of philological criticism."[50] As for Corbin, he followed the example of his mentor Louis Massignon, who during a suicide attempt in the desert of Iraq converted back to Catholicism in the ghostly presence of his dissertation subject, the tenth-century Sufi al-Hallaj. Corbin similarly claimed that an eleventh-century Sufi master, Suhrawardi, had personally initiated and transmitted teachings to him while he was absorbed in Suhrawardi's writings.[51]

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[44] See Kripal, *Roads of Excess*.

[45] Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

In a similar spirit again, Daniel Gold has recently studied for us some of the aesthetic dimensions of writing and reading in the modern study of religion and in what he calls the "religiohistorical sublime"—that is, that experience of the abyss or the transcendent-as-limit often evoked by the writings of historians of religion and commonly experienced by their sensitive readers. Invoking Kant's notion of the sublime, Gold argues that the ambivalent experience of beauty and fear readers often experience in works of scholarship arises from their (correct) sense that something profound is being communicated, and that this something, if taken seriously, will effectively dissolve the assumed certainties of the reader's own lifeworld. The result in the individual is often transport—followed by fear. This same ambivalence is doubled, moreover, by the ambivalence of the scholars themselves, who, more often than not, are both attracted to the beauty and depth of religious language and profoundly uncomfortable with its unjustified claims to absolute truth. As heirs of both Enlightenment reason and Romantic imagination, such scholars are being true to their deepest cultural legacies and intellectual conclusions.[52]

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[46] Mircea Eliade, "The Secret of Dr. Honigberger," in *Two Strange Tales* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970; reprint, Boston: Shambhala, 1986). For a fuller exposition of Eliade's Tantric mysticism, see Kripal, "'The Visitation of the Stranger': On Some Mystical Dimensions of the History of Religions," *CrossCurrents* 49.3 (fall 1999): 367–86.

[47] Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 12. See also Joseph Dan, "Gershom Scholem—Mystiker oder Geschichtsschreiber des Mystischen?" in *Gershom Scholem: Zwischen den Disziplinen*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Gary Smith (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989).

[48] See Scholem's speech "My Way to Kabbalah (1974)," in *On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in Our Time and Other Essays*, ed. Avraham Shapira, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 20–24.

[49] Quoted in David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 32.

[50] Biale, *Gershom Scholem*, 32.

[51] Discussed in Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 146.

[52] See Daniel Gold, *Aesthetics and Analysis in Writing on Religion: Modern Fascinations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

On "Mysticism" as a Modern Term of Art

Another way of observing this pattern is through a genealogy of the category of mysticism itself. This eminently modern category—or rather, construction—amounts to a celebration of premodern forms of consciousness and writing as reviewed (to quote Wouter Hanegraaff) "in the mirror of secular thought."[53] Although the category of mysticism has precedents reaching back as far as the eighteenth century in England (where, in its first appearance, it already signaled a sublimated feminine eroticism),[54] the seventeenth century in France,[55] and—at least in adjectival form—the ancient Mediterranean world,[56] the noun as used today was more or less born in June 1902, when William James published *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*.[57] Significantly, James wrote this text in part out of his own experiments with nitrous oxide and parapsychological phenomena, which he approached with great philosophical seriousness and a quite radical empiricism. Put more baldly, mysticism, rather than being an ancient category easily found in all religions in all times, derives its modern salience from a mystically inclined Harvard professor and parapsychologist speaking in Scotland whose published lectures have since been read by countless other scholars of religion (and practitioners) and subsequently developed into a coherent, often quite popular idea that we know by the name James gave it. It should hardly surprise us, then, that the modern study of religion displays numerous qualities or dimensions that can be classified as a modern or postmodern mysticism: the discipline, after all, created that term, partly no doubt to capture its own implicit interests, goals, and forms of consciousness. Put most simply, mysticism and the modern study of religion are inseparable because they are largely about the same set of modernist and now postmodernist convictions, forms of self-reflexivity, and theoretical approaches to religious plurality. Mysticism is our response to the same global forces and epistemological problems that produced Ramakrishna's experiments. It is our chosen *sadhana*, our own comparative mystics.

But I do not myself want to define the term "mystical" as replicating *bhava*, *brahman*, or *samadhi* as Ramakrishna used those words.[58] Sometimes explained as a particular state of consciousness or a collection of psychological experiences reserved for extraordinary individuals, mysticism is better defined (so the theologian Don Cupitt has shown) as a discipline of writing. It is a necessarily subversive hermeneutical practice that works in the here and now to "melt down" the dualisms of orthodoxy established (so mystics hold) to delay salvation, liberation, or enlightenment interminably. So defined, the mystical is fundamentally opposed to all forms of institutional mediation. The religious and implicitly political critiques advanced by mystics tend to be compromised as their writings are appropriated by the orthodox authorities of their traditions. Censorship, including self-censorship, is a part of any writing practice that describes itself as secret, esoteric, or *mustikos*. But the radicalism remains, as the censorship is usually incomplete or half-hearted, and the secret is often more or less public. We have, then, a pair of explanations for the esoteric nature of mystical discourse:

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[53] Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

[54] Leigh Eric Schmidt, "The Making of Modern 'Mysticism,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71.2 (2003): 273–302.

[55] De Certeau, "Mysticism," trans. Marsanne Brammer, *Diacritics* 22.2 (summer 1992): 11–25.

[56] Louis Bouyer, "Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word," in *Understanding Mysticism*, ed. Richard Woods (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1980), 42–55.

[57] I am indebted to Don Cupitt for this striking thesis. See his *Mysticism after Modernity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998).

[58] Although many scholarly and popular uses of the word *mysticism* come very close indeed. Robert K. C. Forman's notions of a "pure consciousness event" underlying all cultural expressions of the mystical, for example, is near to Ramakrishna's understanding of *brahman* as *saccidananda* or "being-consciousness-bliss." See Forman, *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

> The reason why mystics use language in the strange ways they do is twofold: on the one hand, they are trying to play games with language in such a way as to destabilize structures of religious oppression that are firmly built into language. . . . But, on the other hand, they are acutely conscious of being surrounded by enemies who will seize upon a careless word and use it to destroy them. . . . If a mystic's writing sometimes appears far-fetched or fanciful, the reason is not that he or she is a soulful eccentric with idiosyncratic ideas about heavenly matters, but rather that religious utterance is surrounded by very severe pressures and threats of a political kind.[59]

Among the most striking examples of this phenomenon is the writing of William Blake, that "witness against the Beast" whose weird poetic-political visions literary critics have read as a radical's coded critique of imperialism and monarchy.[60] At the end of his long history of religious studies, Walter Capps turns to consider "what turmoil William Blake's insights would create for the methodological conceptualization of standard religious studies. How could any of them be fitted to any coherent scheme, or, if they were, would they remain what they were originally? Why is the mentality of the technician sanctioned in religious studies while the attitude of the artist is treated with suspicion?"[61] In light of my previous remarks about mystical writing as a form of art and esoteric politics, we should perhaps be asking a different question: In what ways and modes is the modern study of religion *already* Blakean in character?

A standard way of resisting the visionary tendencies of scholarship in this field is to pose still another question as the basis of wholesome training and methodology: What is the proper relationship between the study of religions and the religions studied? Historically, this question has been asked (and unfortunately answered) with reference to the categories of the "insider" and the "outsider." Who makes the better scholar? The insider has been acculturated into the ritual, doctrinal, and mythical intimacies of a religious tradition and so can better describe its feel and meanings; and yet because of that intimacy, the insider can lack the critical edge or emotional distance necessary for reductive analysis and for asking embarrassing questions. The outsider, on the other hand, may lack a natural feel for the tradition studied and so miss much of the detail and subtleties, but distance provides resources for asking questions and for arriving at independent answers.

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[59] Cupitt, *Mysticism after Modernity*,120.

[60] See, for instance, David V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet against Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954); Edward Palmer Thompson, *Witness against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (New York: New Press, 1993).

[61] Walter H. Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995), 342.

Back and forth the discussion has gone for nearly a century, with no resolution in sight.[62] I do not want to enter, at least not directly, into this debate here, as I think its very terms preclude its resolution: "insider" and "outsider," after all, are binary categories that imply opposition and thus tension. Dialectical tension may be basic to intellectual or ethical progress ("without Contraries [there] is no progression," Blake writes in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*), but I would suggest that we understand the tension as emblematic of a deeper relationship—as a *marriage*, to use Blake's metaphor again. Ironically, the metaphors of the "inside" and "outside" themselves already imply a resolution, as they imply a single container that may be experienced differently from different viewpoints.

The study of religion occupies a liminal and problematic place in the modern university because, as a hermeneutic discipline suited to understanding and appreciating religious experience, it often looks (and sometimes really is) religious. But as a social-scientific practice suited to observing the political, social, economic, psychological, and sexual aspects of religious phenomena, the academic study of religion will appear irreligious to pious believers. Remove either pole of this paradox and the discipline collapses. For the sake of simplification, I would put the point in counterstructural terms: I see the relationship of the critical study of religion to religion as very roughly analogous with that of the apophatic mystical traditions to the religions from which they developed and in which they historically flourished. In other words, the critical study of religion is to religion as mystical deconstruction is to orthodox creed, ritual, or law. Early Christian antinomianism (in relation to first-century Jewish purity codes), the psychologized biblical hermeneutics of early Jewish and Christian gnostics (in relation to the more literal readings of the Jewish and Christian orthodox communities), the transgressive erotics of the Hindu Tantra (in relation to the Brahmanical *dharma*, caste, and purity codes), some forms of radical Sufism (in relation to the Islam of the *ulama*), medieval kabbalah (in relation to rabbinic Judaism), and the academic study of religion today (in relation to the religions studied) appear to share a set of practices. Each mystical mode evidences a type of intellectualism bordering upon a type of nihilism, and each prescribes transgressive acts designed to reveal the socially constructed nature of presumed religious reality. Each mode, moreover, sponsors an erotic hermeneutics (gnostic, Tantric, Sufi, Taoist, and kabbalistic erotics make Freud's insights into the connection between sexuality and religion appear prosaic)—and each mode mounts a philosophical critique of dogma, the result of which is often censorship or actual persecution by the orthodox authorities of its own counterculture.

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[62] For an eloquent editorial mapping of this debate, see Russell McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider-Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (London: Cassell, 1999).

Scholars of comparative religion have grouped these countercultures under the heading "mysticism" because they intuit in all of them a not-yet-fully articulated or understood form of consciousness that they themselves to an extent share. The structural resonances between mystical and critical hermeneutic practices explain why the study of mysticism has been central to the modern study of religion. In effect, modern scholars have privileged what they have identified with themselves and thus understood. But the comparativist's unacknowledged normative aim—a kind of esoteric universal humanism—is also at work in this context. The differences among and between the orthodox forms of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are very great, and their mystical subcultures are inextricably involved in the traditions from which they emerged. But those subcultures can seem to be uncannily similar to each other, at least in structure. Each routinely transgresses the binary categories of its own orthodox culture. The mysticisms are thus viewed by modern scholarship as similar in hermeneutic practice, if not in metaphysical substance. This perception on the part of religious comparativists may help explain why nineteenth-century Western intellectuals were so attracted to the "mystic East": not always to colonize it, as is often assumed (although that was happening too), but more often to draw inspiration and strength for their own subversions of normative Western culture. And indeed, what in the end could be more subversive of Christian exclusivism and the cultural arrogance of Christendom than the realization that there are other great world religions—"other Europes," as Schwab put it—with dramatically different deities, forms of salvation, and coherent ethical systems? The plurality of high cultures and great religions was established as a fact of social science, and as a result ideas like "saved," "chosen," and "damned" became suspect within even insular varieties of Western religion.

Here too we can better understand why the comparative study of religion grew markedly in the countercultural 1960s (the American Academy of Religion, by far the largest organization of its kind in the world, was founded in 1964), and why so many Asianists who grew up in this climate ultimately turned to Hindu and Buddhist forms of Tantra—to Asian countercultures—as their chosen specialization: echoes of counterculture answer one another and then harmonize across space and time. Perhaps not accidentally, this period also signaled the high point of Freud's popularity in American intellectual life and the definitive entrance of feminism into popular consciousness; sex was an order of the day. The same decade (it was 1965) saw the lifting of the Asian Exclusion Act (1924), transforming the shape of American religious pluralism.[63] Most established scholars of religion, I would hazard, were first introduced to Hinduism and Buddhism in this countercultural, existential, and eroticized context. Little wonder, then, that so many contemporary Buddhist practitioners found their first taste of enlightenment in psychedelic states.[64] In the end, it is American counterculture, not British colonialism, that best explains the origins, dynamics, and enduring interests of the academic field of comparative religion—our own comparative mystics.

The Scandal of Comparison

There is one sense at least in which the modern study of religion is more radical than its mystical precursors. The academic field of comparative religion recognizes no specific orthodoxy for subversion: it cannot recognize the authority of any particular religion. A Christian who is offended by the Jesus Seminar and its historical-critical methods ("Jesus probably said almost none of this") would scarcely blink at scholarship of the kind applied to the Qur'an or to a Hindu scripture. Similarly, the Muslim or Hindu who rejects psychological or sociological methods applied to Islamic or Indic materials as "neocolonialist" or "Orientalist" is either unaware that the same methods have been applied very extensively to Christianity and Judaism for nearly two centuries, or else, if aware, could not care less. In either case, the believer himself may selectively use critical-historical methods to debunk religious worldviews other than his or her own.

The true scandal of religious studies lies not in what any particular work of scholarship has to say about any particular religious belief, practice, or community, but rather in the discipline's implied insistence that all religious phenomena, without exception, are fruitfully approached as human products and studied with the same literary and social-scientific methods. The egalitarianism of religious studies, as currently pursued (especially in the United States), denies the ultimacy and authority of any local truth or practice and the primacy of any religious community; and academic religious scholarship finds all claims to primacy or authority interesting subjects of historical, anthropological, and psychological investigation. While each religious orthodoxy denies the claims of other orthodoxies, and while mystical countercultures subvert many claims of the religions from which they derive, academics in religious studies today subvert the claims of *all* religions, first and foremost the Western monotheisms of Judaism and Christianity from which the critical study of religion historically arose.

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[63] For a collection of primary sources from this American story and a series of insightful introductory essays, see Thomas A. Tweed and Stephen Prothero, *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[64] Allan Hunt Badiner, ed., *Zig Zag Zen: Buddhism and Psychedelics* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2002). For an eloquent discussion of this cultural pattern and another story of religious hypocrisy and institutional denial, see Rick Strassman, *DMT: The Spirit Molecule* (Rochester, VT: Park Street, 2001), esp. chap. 20, "Stepping on Holy Toes."

Framing the modern study of religion as a counterculture with nothing in particular to counter is not unproblematic, of course. Steven Wasserstrom has expressed suspicion of the paradoxical phenomenon he calls "religion after religion" and has criticized what he describes as the discipline's "mystocentrism." Academic religious studies, in other words, are in his view fixated inappropriately on mysticism and mythology while showing inadequate interest in orthodox creeds, as well as ethics, ritual, and the mundane workings of religion in society.[65] Still, how *does* one go back to believing the unbelievable? The virgin birth of Jesus, the childhood exploits of Krishna, the night journey of Muhammad, and the burning bush of Moses may be central truths of Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism, but they are rather obviously myths to those who stand outside those traditions. How is a scholar of comparative religion to forget this simple and obvious point? On the other hand, I do want to affirm Wasserstrom's other key argument about the ethical liabilities of mysticism and the troubling political affiliations of many who have made it their life's study: the absolute collapse of difference within mystical monism does not lend itself to an adequate ethics or to vibrant social critique.[66] Wasserstrom has rightly reminded us that mysticism, gnosticism, and fascism are by no means incompatible.[67] But these dangers should be remote so long as we keep the premodern elements of mysticism tied to the critical and reductionist methods of the social sciences (something that Eliade, Corbin, and, above all, René Guenon failed to do).[68]

Where Wasserstrom and other like-minded colleagues want to move the discipline more fully toward pure reason — to make it more academic in every sense — my interest is more in moving it beyond the faith/reason distinction into a new kind of *gnosis* and into less predictable forms of argument and expression. What I have in mind is the kind of work done by the French literary critic Abdelwahab Meddeb in his recent book *The Malady of Islam*. Here the author consistently turns to the Sufism of the Indian Akbarian tradition,[69] particularly as it was elaborated in the framework of the esoteric sciences of Ibn ʻArabi (1164–1240)—"the Andalusian master who recommended being ʻ*hyle* so that all beliefs can take form within you . . . [and who had] the capacity to internalize all forms of beliefs and to progress with their truth without trying to reduce them or make them disappear."[70] Meddeb's aim is to subject the archaisms, criminal monstrosities, and gross contradictions of Islamic fundamentalism to criteria fully established in the Islamic tradition—a move that supports my claim that one of our best hopes for cross-cultural influence lies in the mystical traditions of our religions with their radical hermeneutic practices and pluralistic sensibilities. The same, moreover, could be said about Rabbi Michael Lerner's *Tikkun* magazine and community, which have worked to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by invoking mystical themes linked to hard-nosed political criticism. Lerner is explicit about his debts to Jewish mysticism.[71]

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[65] An analogous expression—"the religion of no religion"—was employed by the German comparativist of religion Frederic Spiegelberg to describe and celebrate a similar mystical denial of difference and local custom. See his *The Religion of No-Religion* (Stanford, CA: Delkin, 1948).

[66] I have written at length about this same issue and its twentieth-century history in "Debating the Mystical as the Ethical: An Indological Map," in Barnard and Kripal, *Crossing Boundaries*.

[67] For a more recent study that serves to confirm this same point, see Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*.

[68] I am in agreement with Wasserstrom and others who have criticized the Eliadean tradition (scholars such as Timothy Fitzgerald, Bruce Lincoln, Russell McCutcheon, Hans Penner, J. Z. Smith, Ivan Strenski, and Donald Wieb) for failure to be suspicious of their subjects of study.

Such moves are not in themselves sufficient, and we should not neglect the labor of analyzing and correcting the grossly obvious injustices and imbalances of international relations or even take off the table the card of military intervention. Meddeb, for example, is highly critical of American foreign policy in the Middle East, but he does not exclude the possibility, even necessity, of military action in some cases. Nor does he make the mistake of laying all blame on America and Europe for what he calls "the malady of Islam," a "sickness" that has done much to lay waste to a once gorgeous, sensual, pluralistic, and sophisticated civilization, now resentful and "inconsolable in its destitution." Meddeb understands and embraces the broader historical context—the rise of modernity and the Enlightenment, and the internal failures of Islam to answer or fully participate in them—and then goes on to develop a richly dialectical model of Islam as an intimate partner of the West and its history. In other words, he enacts another mystical denial of difference.

Perhaps, then, what I am offering here, to continue with the political or diplomatic context, is a kind of "track-two diplomacy," a term coined by the diplomat Joseph Montville to evoke all those cultural, scientific, and personal exchanges between nations that seldom make the news but nevertheless have real effects. In an important essay that Montville coauthored in 1982 with William Davidson, they defined track-two diplomacy as “unofficial, non-structured interaction. It is always open minded, often altruistic, and . . . strategically optimistic, based on best case analysis. Its underlying assumption is that actual or potential conflict can be resolved or eased by appealing to common human capabilities to respond to good will and reasonableness.”[72] Although no substitute for traditional track-one diplomacy with its “carrots and sticks,” track-two diplomacy has its own genius and role to play in international relations. I am not offering a cure-all solution, nor even a primary response to religious violence and enmity. But a gnostic track-two diplomacy that explores the hermeneutic and countercultural resources of opposed traditions may have irenic consequences.

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[69] Abdelwahab Meddeb, *The Malady of Islam*, trans. Pierre Joris and Ann Reid (New York: Basic Books, 2003). The consistency of Meddeb's historical invocation of the mystical within Islam as an answer to the present ignorance and violence of Islamic fundamentalism is truly remarkable. See esp. 13, 23, 27, 39–40, 44–45, 51, 55, 59–60, 129–30. He is also perfectly aware of the intimate organic, even physiological, link between sensuality and cultural creativity (see esp. chap. 23).

[70] Meddeb, *Malady of Islam*, 129, 130. Ibn ʻArabi, in other words, advanced perhaps a form of the same mystical worldview that Ramakrishna would participate in six hundred years later.

[71] See Michael Lerner, *Spirit Matters* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads, 2000).

The Gnostic Study of Religion

Aspects of the Asian traditions (particularly some nationalist or communal dimensions of contemporary Hinduism) may presently be suffering a historical amnesia with respect to their own subversive and erotic dimensions—no doubt brought on by the historical sickness of colonialism against which they still feel a need to be immunized. But all of these Asian traditions are rich in the sorts of mystical resources I have been discussing. If this generalization is even approximately true, then for any cross-cultural bridge we construct, the most difficult foundational work will need to be done on the Western side. We will have to struggle with Western exclusivism in all its modes—theological, cultural, and political—and in particular against the monotheistic tendency to “smash the idols” and deny the truths of others. Such a task, however, will require better informed cultural memories and less belligerent intellectual and imaginative practices. Christians, Muslims, and Jews need to approach the problem together with cultural resources that, happily, they share in the interrelated mystical traditions of the Bible, gnosticism, and Neoplatonism. The potential of a modern critical gnosticism seems especially worth exploring. Gilles Quispel has suggested that Western culture possesses three ways of understanding—faith, reason, and *gnosis*—and that the third (knowledge that comes from intuitive, visionary, or mystical experience of the divine, rather than from either faith or reason) has been the least developed.[73] The study of religion shares in a dual heritage deriving from the Enlightenment, with its suspicious and rational approach to religion, and from the Romantic movement, with its apotheosis of the imagination; and there are many forms of study that privilege one or the other of these modes. But there is a third epistemology, largely untapped even in religious studies, and following Quispel I suggest that we think of it as fundamentally gnostic.

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[72] William D. Davidson and Joseph V. Montville, “Foreign Policy according to Freud,” *Foreign Policy* 45 (winter 1981–82): 145–57.

[73] Gilles Quispel, ed., *Gnosis: De derde component van de Europese cultuurtraditie* (Utrecht: HES, 1988), 9. Wouter Hanegraaff proposed both this idea and the reference.

The gnostic does not *believe* tenets or *discover* truths, like an orthodox religionist, on the one hand, or like a rationalist, on the other hand. The gnostic *knows*, and among the things he or she knows is that the knowledge he or she possesses cannot be reconciled with the claims of any past, present, or future religion. To borrow an expression from Elaine Pagels, gnostic epistemology is "beyond belief."[74] Historically speaking, gnostics tend toward esotericism so as to avoid persecution. What sets apart the modern academic gnostic from premodern precursors is the academic's secure home in a central institution of Western liberal society: the college or university. This relatively new fact of sociology, combined with the historical implausibility, social dysfunction, and increasing violence of traditional religious systems, has rendered unnecessary the usual strategies of dissimulation and concealment. Thus, the gnostic critique of orthodoxies is now available in thousands of classrooms and on innumerable library shelves in Western vernacular languages. I do not mean only that the Zohar and the Gnostic Gospels have been translated and are popular on undergraduate reading lists. I mean also that the masters of suspicion (to use Paul Ricoeur's term) in modern philosophy and social science are invoked within religious studies as heroic figures whose ideas are as necessary to mature religious faith as the disillusionments of childhood are to growing up. The reductionistic methods of religious studies often function as apophatic techniques to expose a fraudulent demiurge posing as "God." They thus free us for more genuine, more mature, and less dangerous forms of spirituality. They tell us what "God" is *not* and how human, all too human, many of our religious ideas are. Perhaps this is why the great Protestant theologian Paul Tillich insisted on the radical rationality of mystical writers, saw mysticism as an important component of the world's religions, and chose to define the category of mysticism as "God fighting religion within religion."[75]

Professional Heresy: Gnosticism versus Contextualism

I am aware that humanities disciplines, apart from comparative religion, are now basically contextualist in orientation. Knowing (*gnosis*) disappears where contexts are said to be incommensurable and cultures are not subject to criticism by criteria other than their own. Gnosticism is therefore, among the milieus that dismiss epistemological doubt, perhaps the most mistrusted. Not only does the kind of academic gnosticism I am proposing here question the infallibility of modern epistemology, it refuses—adamantly—to ground itself in any one tradition, context, or regime of truth. It is notoriously comparative, countercultural, and even (it might be added) anticultural. Still, contextualists should not reject the gnostic stance automatically. Our present historical context, after all, indicates that contextualism operates politically to balkanize the human species and hinder efforts to establish standards for a much-needed global morality. Moreover, contextualists—who tend to be trained in history and historical method—know that there have long been people who, on the basis of claims to *gnosis* wider and deeper than local knowledge, have risked their lives to expose cultural, national, and religious myths as such. If there is hope for our religious worlds—and there may not be—it may well reside in this attitude of openness, dissent, and (finally) heresy.

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[74] Elaine H. Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003).

[75] Paul Tillich, *The Future of Religions*, ed. Jerald C. Brauer (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

While reflecting on the literal etymology of *heresy* (as *haeresia* or "choice": the choosing of personal conviction over the authority of tradition or group), Elaine Pagels quotes to good effect the early Church Father Irenaeus against himself. Irenaeus, she writes, "mocked his Gnostic opponent for encouraging his fellow Christians to seek experiential confirmation of their beliefs and ever-new visions: 'every one of them generates something new every day, according to his ability; for no one is considered "mature" [or "initiated"] among them who does not develop some enormous lies.' "[76] In an implicitly humorous aside, Pagels goes on to point out that Irenaeus's description of gnostic Christians describes the kind of free thinking that we nourish and model in higher education today. Our entire system—from undergraduate Socratic discussion (Socrates, recall, was condemned by Athens for corrupting its youth), to the mandatorily original Ph.D. dissertation, to the ever-new lists of our university presses—is designed explicitly to "generate something new every day, according to [our] ability." And the newer, the more provocative, the more "controversial," the better. In effect, we are professional heretics, paid to choose and propagate our own truths and visions in the free marketplace of ideas.

This stance may not always bode well, of course, for our relationships with the religions some of us love and study, but at least a gnostic model offers one possible way through the culturally creative but ultimately unbelievable dualisms with which we struggle. In this light, it is possible to be both an "insider" and an "outsider," to draw on the symbolic and ritual resources of a tradition without being slavishly bound to it, to love a religion and be publicly critical of its lies, to choose a form of consciousness that participates in both "faith" and "reason" but moves beyond both into a kind of *gnosis*, even to internalize and imaginatively unite other religious traditions with one's own. Ibn 'Arabi made such claims in fourteenth-century Andalusia, as did Kabir, Guru Nanak, and Akbar in late medieval India and Ramakrishna in nineteenth-century colonial Bengal. We are trying such experiments again, now, in our own historical context.

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[76] Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, 96.

It is a depressing historical fact that all of these previous experiments largely failed because the orthodox cultures in which they were embedded were ultimately successful in domesticating, taming, even suppressing the countercultural forces of their mystical thinkers and writers. It remains to be seen what will happen to our own mystical denial of difference in our more secular and global context. As I write, many of us in Indology are under rather severe political pressures from both a nationalist-controlled central government in India and some wealthy, ultraconservative segments of the Hindu diaspora to censor our future writings and publicly recant and apologize for our published expressions of modern gnosticism. Ban movements are organized against our books, lawsuits and imprisonment in India are entertained in the Indian media, and some of our Indian colleagues must now live with bodyguards to protect them. Sadly, similar assaults on the intellectual and civil liberties of scholars of religion could be easily repeated within other subdisciplines of the field, from biblical studies to Buddhology. In short, many of us work under conditions similar to those that have always created esoteric forms of counterculture. Hence many of us have found some measure of inspiration and even hope in the mystical-critical texts of Ibn ʻArabi, Meister Eckhart, William Blake, and Ramakrishna. Their remarkable texts, if not always their traditions, stand to this day and for us as powerful witnesses to the not-impossible.[77]

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77. I would like to thank Karen Harris, Jeffrey Perl, Joseph Prabhu, and Mark Sedgwick for their critical readings, moral support, and substantive suggestions regarding this essay.

THE PHASMID AND THE TWIG

Tobie Nathan

Translated by Devorah R. Karp

In the eighth century B.C., the Kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians. Between 740 and 720, almost the entire Jewish population was expelled and replaced by Assyrian colonists. The ten tribes that made up the Northern Kingdom then disappeared from history forever. They reappear in legends here and there—among the Khazars, in America, in Africa. The African hypothesis has survived until today. A few years ago, a patient of mine from the Ivory Coast, a speaker of Dan, told me that he descended from the Israelite tribe of Dan. His were more than mere words: he wore a skullcap, let the fringes of his prayer shawl hang down from his jacket, and injected into every second sentence an emphatic *baroukh Hashem* to convince me that he was what he claimed. More recently, another African patient—who comes from one of the groups of *bamileké*, of whom it is said in the Cameroons that they are the "Jews of Africa"—told me with the deepest conviction that he was a Levite and that his father and grandfather had been royal seers.

The lost tribes of Israel, at least according to historians, were assimilated by the Assyrians, adopting their language, Aramaic, and their religion and merging into the people of the conquerors.

Common Knowledge 10:3

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Thinking of Defeat: Hosea

Naturally, the Hebrew prophets had something to say about this catastrophe which remains, doubtless, among the most terrible that the Jewish people has had to endure. The first prophet, chronologically, to report on this unprecedented disaster was Hosea (even if in the Jewish Bible his prophecy succeeds that of Isaiah). Hosea talks of war and violence but focuses on defeat. He explains and comments on the defeat and predicts consequences still more terrible than the defeat itself. His words are frightening and profound, as the prophets' words often are: spine-chilling curses interspersed with truths. Everyone knows at least one of Hosea's utterances: "Yea, the calf of Samaria shall be broken in shivers. / For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind; / It hath no stalk, the bud that shall yield no meal . . ." (8:6–7).

Hosea's thinking is clear. If the Kingdom of Israel collapsed before the invasions of Tiglath-Pileser III and Salmaneser V, it is because the Israelites had subscribed to foreign deities, sacrificed to idols, offered bread, blood, and libations to Baals. But the situation is more complex: the God of the Jews, Hashem, had armed the Assyrian kings to punish his own people. Hashem announces through his prophet that nothing will remain of the Kingdom of Israel and that its capital Samaria will fall ("the calf of Samaria shall be broken in shivers"). And that is precisely what occurred.

Two ideas emerge from this text—the first, surprising but simple; and the second, strange, hard to imagine, perplexing. The simple idea is that, in spite of appearances, it is not men that make war but gods. As in the battles of the *Iliad*, men kill one another but, behind them, manipulating them like puppets, the gods foment and organize strife. Furthermore, if it is the gods who are in confrontation, defeat should naturally lead the conquered to adopt the god of the conquerors, to worship him and submit to his law. Hosea protests against this natural tendency. He indeed issues a warning to his people: abandoning the God of Israel would be suicide. Hosea warns them that the link binding the Jews to Hashem is unique, an indissoluble bond like the marriage between Adam and Eve. Hence he urges them to consider their defeat a consequence of their treachery and not proof of the superiority of other peoples' gods.

As for Hosea's second idea: if Hashem strengthened the hand of the Assyrians in order to inflict the harshest punishment upon them, what was happening at the same time to the gods of the Assyrians? Were they physically present during the battles? Did Hashem come to an understanding with the gods of the Assyrians behind the back of his people? Could human beings intervene in any way in these negotiations among deities in order to persuade either side or to influence the final outcome of the conflict? These questions do not of course appear in Hosea's text, but they are its logical counterpoint and remain an enigma confronting humans to this day.

Thinking of Defeat: Freud

At the height of World War I, in 1915, Freud published a book reflecting on war and death. The thoughts he develops there are intended as words of wisdom and conciliation as well as philosophical reflections on negativity. Devastated by the brutal change of perspective forced on him by events, Freud wrote: “We cannot but feel that no event has ever destroyed so much that is precious in the common possessions of humanity, confused so many of the clearest intelligences, or so thoroughly debased what is highest.”[1] It seemed inconceivable to Freud that war could be waged between civilized peoples and it be the work of the nation, in his view, farthest removed from primitive barbarism (Germany). “We live in hopes,” he wrote, “that the pages of an impartial history will prove that the nation, in whose language we write and for whose victory our dear ones are fighting, has been precisely the one which has least transgressed the laws of civilization” (279).

In the midst of the war, having seen the massacres, having been carried away, in spite of his resistance, by passions that he found unhealthy, Freud, like Hosea, was beset by an insoluble contradiction. And also like the prophet, Freud put forward two ideas, one simple and accessible, the other contradictory and implicit. The first argument begins in a manner similar to Hosea’s. It is not men who wage war but forces of extraordinary power, acting without human knowledge, that impel men to violence, hatred, and destruction. Those forces are the drives. Suppressed by education, social life, the moral and cultural aspirations of civilization, these drives suddenly awaken and their power is all the more uncontrollable because, while dormant at the heart of mankind, they have remained as primitive as in the beginning. From these considerations, Freud wrote:

> We may already derive one consolation . . . our mortification and our painful disillusionment on account of the uncivilized behaviour of our fellow-citizens of the world during this war were unjustified. They were based on an illusion to which we had given way. In reality our fellow-citizens have not sunk so low as we feared, because they had never risen so high as we believed. (285)

Freud’s tone is of course not that of the reproving preacher; he speaks in measured tones like a man of science. But his rhetoric is like Hosea’s. As the Jewish people was succumbing in Hosea’s time to old demons, devoting itself to the worship of disgraced gods and as a result approaching its doom, so the “citizens of the world" in Freud's day were overtaken by uncontrollable and savage drives.

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[1] Sigmund Freud, “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death” (1915), vol. 14 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1957), 275.

As for the second idea in Freud's text, it is his answer to the inevitable question: what can be done? What can be done to avoid the moral cataclysm of war? Freud's answer is: Nothing. Nothing can be done because, when human beings assemble in large groups, their wild impulses become uncontrollable: "It is just as though when it becomes a question of a number of people, not to say millions, all individual moral acquisitions are obliterated, and only the most primitive, the oldest, the crudest mental attitudes are left" (288). There is nothing to do but wait for mankind to mature.

Again, as in Hosea's text, no negotiation is possible. We have seen how Hosea precluded negotiation between Hashem and the gods of the Jews' enemies. Freud conceived the true antagonists of war, the wild drives, as impervious to reason. He begrudgingly grants to humans the capacity for awareness of this fact and for showing their awareness by being more frank and truthful in their relationships with one another.

The Covenant

A comparison between two texts so far apart in time may seem adventurous. One of them, Hosea's, speaks only of one people, his people, reminding them of the unique relationship that binds them to their God; while the other text, Freud's, contends with all mankind in a vast and frantic vision. This difference is important, I agree, at least insofar as the fusion of the people and their God is concerned. Here Hosea shows himself to be more pragmatic than Freud, much closer to what people are feeling. He is more of a psychologist, one might say (as if that word had any meaning in Hosea's time). Freud, on the other hand, has a metaphysical interpretation and a cerebral view of the link between man and his impulses.

In Hosea we find the most precise expression in the Bible of the carnal link between mankind and God. The prophesy of Hosea begins with Hashem instructing the prophet: "Go, take unto thee a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry; for the land doth commit great harlotry" (1:2). The land, the people—God's wife—is prostituting herself to foreign gods. The passage is less figural than it is a reminder of how the Jewish people is constituted. Adam was both man and woman initially; and every *ben adam*—a Hebrew phrase that means literally "son of Adam" but also means both "a human being" and "a well-raised decent person"—is similarly constituted. Mainstream Jewish tradition holds that individuals become fully human only when they find a complementary, opposite-sex partner. Genesis says *betselem oto bara elohim zakhar unekeva*, "in his own image God created him man and woman." It is only this type of human being (the human being that is a couple) who interests the Jewish God, and this is the only partner it is possible for him to have. The relationship that God maintains with human beings is carnal: the God of the Jews in this one respect, at least, resembles the Baals, who consorted carnally with their creatures (and sometimes, it is said, devoured them). Nevertheless, the Jewish God radically differs from the Baals, whose relationships were with individuals — the God of the Jews has relationships only with couples (male and female conjoined, as at the creation).

The kabbalists of medieval Spain in particular grasped this unique attribute of the Jewish God. Abraham Abulafia and, above all, his pupil Joseph Gikatila surveyed at length the tangible consequences. A passage from Gikatila's *Secret of the Marriage of David and Bathsheba* confirms what might seem an improbable assertion:

> And know and believe that, at the beginning of the creation of Man from a drop of semen, this man contains three associated elements, the father, the mother, and the Holy One, Blessed be He. And when a male creature is created, his female partner is necessarily created at the same time as he, because on high they never create a half-formed creature but only a complete entity.[2]

It is this "complete entity" who alone can couple with God — and though the coupling takes place in God's own, unknowable way, it is always on behalf of fertility.

References to this sacred process appear often in kabbalist literature, but kabbalah is not the unique source. If we find in the medieval *Zohar* that "the Holy One, Blessed be He, unites couples in matrimony" (*mezug zouigine*: he "marries couples"), we find phrases just as evocative in the ancient Midrash.[3] It is entirely conventional for couples to unite sexually on the Sabbath night, after respecting all the laws of purity and praying. In so doing, they invite Hashem into their house, to their table, to their bed, and will unite carnally in God, reinforcing the original covenant and producing fruit of their loins as a benefit. It is doubtless in this way that Gikatila's apparently esoteric formulation should be understood:

> And it is written: "He created male and female, He blessed them and called them by the name Man [Adam] on the day He created them" (Gen. 1:27). "The day He created them," of course! And this is the secret of the verse: "You will keep My Sabbaths and you will fear My sanctu-

[2] Joseph Gikatila, *Le secret du mariage de David et Bethsabée* [The secret of the marriage of David and Bathsheba] (in French and Hebrew), ed. and trans. Charles Mopsik (Combas, France: Editions de l'Eclat, 1994), 45–46.

[3] Cf. Mopsik's commentaries on Gikatila's text quoted above.

> ary (Lev. 19:30). "My Sabbaths," of course! "Remember and observe them."[4] Thus, at the moment of his creation, Man was created androgynous in his soul.[5]

From Genesis on, the Jews define their uniqueness as if deriving from the specificity of this bond with Hashem, a bond not spiritual but explicitly carnal. This bond is not contingent, resulting from a contract or association, but is rather symbiotic, as if between Siamese twins (and thus a link impossible to break). Finally, the bond of God and Israel is symmetrical and creates harmony in the world, according to the logic of a series of couplings:

(1) An individual is a human being (a *ben adam*) only insofar as he or she constitutes a composite being, a couple. This couple will, under certain conditions, become God's partner and, as a result, bear offspring.

(2) The Jewish people is a people and not a collection of assorted individuals, only on condition of its forming a couple with God. If the union is faithful, it is consubstantial—a product of fusion. Separation of Israel from its divine partner implies necessarily the nation's disappearance. In the kabbalists' eyes, only the union of this people with this God assures the harmony of the world: "Every time the people of Israel keeps the holy covenant, it leads to stability in the world, both in the upper and in the lower ranks. Yet, when it breaks the covenant, peace ceases to exist both in the upper and in the lower ranks."[6]

(3) Likewise, God is himself deeply affected, as if carnally, by infidelity on the part of his spouse. The word *betselem* ("in his image") in Genesis 1:26 implies that God depends, in some unspecified way, on the consubstantial couple (initially called Adam, then Adam and Eve) whom he creates. But Hosea's account of divine dependency is very specific and carnal. Hosea marries Gomer the prostitute and she bears him, first, a son. Then "she conceived again, and bore a daughter. And [God] said unto [Hosea]: 'Call her name Lo-ruhama [the unloved]; for I will no more love the house of Israel. . . . Now when [Gomer] had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived, and bore a son. And [God] said: 'Call his name Lo-ammi [not My people]; for ye are not My people, and I will not be yours" (1:6, 8–9).[7] In a state of prophetic awe, Hosea was called upon to marry a prostitute and thus feel in his flesh what Hashem, the spouse of an unfaithful nation, had endured.

(4) Finally, at least in the kabbalistic tradition, God is also, as it were, a couple, with "male" and "female" emanations (the *sefirot*) that must come to unite.

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[4] In the Hebrew, *zakhor vekhamor* ("remember and observe" the Sabbath) can probably be compared with the previous formulation *zakhar ounekeva* ("male and female") according to a logic of assonance. The conjunction introduces kabbalist theories concerning the union of the two *sefirot*, *Yessod* and *Malkhout*, one male and the other female.

[5] Gikatila, *Secret du mariage*, 46–47.

[6] Zohar 1:66b.

[7] *Lo-ruhama* means, more literally, "that hath not obtained compassion."

Thus, the people of Israel is coupled with a God of Israel who is himself a couple and who, in the beginning, created a consubstantial couple, the hermaphrodite Adam, to be his mate. God urges Hosea to understand, on behalf of the nation, that coupling with God is less a metaphor than a real fusion whose defusing will mean trauma. As God commands Hosea: “Go, love a woman, an adulteress, beloved of another, even as Hashem loveth the children of Israel while they turn toward other gods” (3:1). When Hosea speaks of military defeat, it is not so much political and economic ruin than concerns him but a catastrophic separation and dispersal—the disappearance of the nation and even, implicitly, the disappearance of God. The problem that Hosea raises is more fundamental than that raised by Freud. Nothing binds humanity to its drives except the interpretations of psychologists.

The Diplomat

But these two approaches seem to me equally doomed to failure. Neither can connect with the politics of everyday life, with the immanent world in motion. Neither Hosea nor Freud recognized—each would find laughable—diplomacy and the character of the diplomat. Imagine asking Freud: “Isn’t there some diplomat who could negotiate between mankind and its drives, someone to arrange a marriage on equitable terms?” Freud’s reply would be “certainly not.” Human beings can only admit, and adapt to, the omnipotence of their drives and instincts. We can only retreat, defeated by powers within yet beyond us. No diplomat, no negotiations, no peace of mind. Now imagine asking Hosea: “Isn’t there some diplomat who could moderate a three-way negotiation between God and the Baals, with the interests of the Jews taken seriously at the table?” Hosea would turn his back with scorn: Hashem is a jealous God, he and Israel are as it were married. There is nothing to do but remind the people, warn the people, and prophesy.

I do not claim that this dilemma is simple, its solution obvious. On the contrary, I intend here to respect strictly the requirements of Hosea’s thinking, and of Freud’s. For Freud, a man of science, the truth is nonnegotiable. If he has shown that aggression is a biological drive inherent to human nature, then there is nothing to negotiate. Hosea is a man of God. He has intimately experienced God’s presence; they talk. In his moments of inspiration, he becomes God, or more precisely, both God and his servant, both mouthpiece and interpreter. To suggest to Hosea that other divinities exist, with their own languages, laws, and needs, would be to deny both Hosea’s nature and his function.

The Wolf and the Lamb

In an odd passage from Isaiah, we find the basis for a new approach, one different from that of either Hosea or Freud. After witnessing the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, Isaiah too prophesied "concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (1:1). Isaiah took up the same theme as Hosea, reminding us that the misfortunes of the Jews resulted from their abandoning their covenant with their God, their owner: "The ox knoweth his owner, / And the ass his master's crib; / But Israel doth not know, / My people doth not consider" (1:3).

The odd formulation comes in chapter 11. Isaiah is predicting that a branch will emerge from the family of Jesse (David's line) and that a new era will then commence. The usual interpretation of this passage as regarding the disappearance of aggression from the world—an interpretation that led Christendom to read the prophesy as heralding Christ—poses serious problems. We can begin here:

> And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
> And the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
> And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
> And a little child shall lead them.
> And the cow and the bear shall feed;
> Their young ones shall lie down together;
> And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
> And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp,
> And the weaned child shall put his hand on the basilisk's den.
> (11:6–8)

This passage—supported by lines immediately preceding and following it, notably: "They shall not hurt not destroy / In all My holy mountain; / For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Hashem, / As the waters cover the sea" (11:9)—is interpretable as a message from God demanding universal peace among humans, among peoples, among species. Yet this interpretation clashes with lines soon to appear: "Ephraim shall not envy Judah, / And Judah shall not vex Ephraim" (11:13)—here, Isaiah is preaching reconciliation between two groups of Jewish tribes and not among all nations on earth. He is advising the tribes to make a strategic union that would permit them to confront their enemies and perhaps conquer them. Then he adds: "And they shall fly down upon the shoulder of the Philistines on the west; / Together shall they spoil the children of the east; / They shall put forth their hand upon Edom and Moab; / And the children of Ammon shall obey them" (11:14).

The proposals for universal peace are over, the promises of harmony have disappeared. We are at once again immersed in the comprehensive hostility of a world always at war. What, then, did Isaiah mean? Was he a precursor of St. Paul, representing a God who would lead all nations to peace? (Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither free man nor slave, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”) Or was Isaiah really a precursor of Freud? Freud might easily have echoed and parodied the words of St. Paul: There is neither Jew nor German, neither free man nor slave, neither male nor female—you are all equal in the losing battle against instinct. The enemy is within: his names are Self-Destruction, Aggression, Death Drive.

For my part, I prefer to read the flurry of metaphors in Isaiah as quite different from anything said by either St. Paul or Freud. I read Isaiah as replying to the contradictions in which Hosea had been trapped. The new being whose coming Isaiah heralds, a being capable of bringing peace, is a diplomat, prepared to take on the unprecedented role of bringing under one roof powers very distinct and at war—a being able to suggest inventive, unexpected, and unintended flirtations between deities who simply do not get along.

Can There Be a Dialogue among Gods?

Hashem has his own language and maintains no relationship with the gods of the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Babylonians. . . . For their part, the gods of the Assyrians, the Baals of the Arameans, Chaldeans, and Canaanites have, doubtless, no sympathy for Hashem, their distant cousin, who makes the unique and offensive claim that he is the only deity in this or any world. What is required, therefore, is an unprecedented event. A translator who speaks both the language of the One God and all the languages of the other gods will (on my reading of Isaiah) assemble these adversaries without warning, without their even being aware of it. The wolf lying down with the lamb and the leopard with the kid are unthinkable and indeed impossible marriages but will happen suddenly, according to Isaiah, as if by magic.

His vision is not of a simple utopia, brutally deprived of its tropisms, nor does Isaiah envision the arrival of a totalitarian god reducing by force all beings to the same nature—a fearsome vision, the result of childish thinking alien to so mature a prophet. I do not think that Isaiah wanted the leopard to *become* a kid, the serpent a sucking child, the lamb a wolf. I do not think he imagined that all animals would be reduced to one timid and bleating species. His spirit was too powerful. And Isaiah had too acute an awareness of politics.

Deleuze

It was, I believe, Isaiah’s purpose to personify in a new being (descended in the line of Jesse) the mutual understanding that can sometimes be found in nature.

I mean the kind of understanding that Gilles Deleuze observed between the orchid, which disguises its sexual organs, and the wasp, which assists in the reproduction of the plant and, in that process, ensures its own survival.[8] Deleuze, like Isaiah, was interested in the way that an orchid or wasp, a wolf or lamb, might understand and respect, yet never know, the radically different nature of its other, while all the time pursuing its own interest. The orchid does not understand the wasp in that it complies with the wasp's reasoning; the orchid has its own motive (reproduction). No morality could claim that the orchid is better than the wasp, its motive more valid; nor, conversely, could anyone, regarding the orchid and wasp, argue for the benefits of solidarity among species. The unexpected encounter of orchid and wasp, worked out, doubtless, during millennia of parallel evolution, implies no kind of hierarchy.[9]

Yes, but . . . "worked out"? Worked out by what or—rather—*whom*?

Phasmid and Twig

The processes to which I refer are found also in animals that camouflage themselves. The phasmid is propelled toward the dry twig or the oak leaf, the bombyx toward the bark of the birch tree. In such doings Isaiah sees hope for his new being to come—or, more precisely, the being whom Isaiah foresees could exist only where such doings link beings (rather than individuals). The phasmid, in its imitation of the plants it rests on, owes its life to the twig or oak leaf, yet no phasmid has ever given thought to a twig or imagined itself resembling a leaf. The phasmid is uninterested in, does not notice, the twig or leaf, lest it become lost in a world where phasmids are invaders—a nightmare world.

Perhaps Isaiah 11:6–10 means to say that, when the new being, the mediator descended from Jesse, arrives, the lamb will be moved by the wolf, and the wolf by the lamb, as the orchid and wasp are moved by each other—the very being of the lamb (no lamb in particular) and the very being of the wolf—enabling them to cohabit, even copulate. If such is Isaiah's proposal, as I would like to believe, then I readily declare it prophetic: he knew, more than 2,700 years ago what we would require for survival today.

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[8] "This is it, the double capture, the wasp AND the orchid: not even something which would be in the one, or something which would be in the other, even if it had to be exchanged, be mingled, but something which is between the two, outside the two, and which flows in another direction." Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 7.

[9] See Isabelle Stengers, "Cultures: Guerre et paix. Une semaine à Cerisy," *Ethnopsy* 4 (April 2002): 7–38.

The Year 2001

In this context, it is worth rethinking the signal events of 2001. On March 8 and 9, the Taliban blew up the two giant Buddhas of Bamiyan, Afghanistan, sculpted between the second and fifth centuries. On March 4, in Kandahar, the then-minister of foreign affairs, Wakil Ahmed Mutawakel, had confirmed the order to destroy the statues in these words: “The decree will be carried out, by God’s will.” On March 19, in Doha, Qatar, the television channel Al-Jazeera broadcast film of the destruction: first, the explosion of the smaller statue, thirty-eight meters in height, and then, after a few seconds’ pause while viewers watched the larger statue, another enormous explosion occurred. Thick smoke rose gently to cries of *Allahu Akbar*. The Taliban claimed it was a requirement of Allah to destroy images of the gods of others, including the Buddhas of their neighbors.

A few weeks earlier, during February, in Belgium, the federal minister of agriculture, Jaak Gabriels, banned all movement of farm animals, making it impossible for Belgian Muslims to organize their sacrifice of lambs on *Eid al-Adha*. Gabriels’s was an astonishing move, given that, for the first time, the Belgian authorities had legalized the ritual slaughter and had approved temporary slaughterhouses. Some months before, the prefecture of Paris had banned the ritual slaughter of chickens (the *kappara* ceremony) carried out by some Orthodox Jews to expiate their sins on the eve of Yom Kippur. In the end, in spring 2001, a holocaust (in the original sense) of animals so vast that even Herod the Great would not have dared to imagine it took place on European soil.

On July 2, 2001, Slobodan Milosevic appeared for the first time before the International Court in The Hague. On November 23, the International Penal Court for ex-Yugoslavia (TPIY) charged him with genocide for actions taken during the Bosnian war. The indictment specified that Milosevic “between March 1, 1992, and December 31, 1995, alone or in collusion with others . . . planned, ordered, carried out, or helped to carry out the destruction of all or part of the Muslim or Croatian [Catholic] population of Bosnia.”

Finally, on September 11, two planes flown by Islamic kamikazes crashed into the Twin Towers in New York; a third plane crashed into the Pentagon, causing some 3,000 deaths. We learned soon after that these attacks had been financed by the Islamist leader Osama bin Laden. On October 7, Bin Laden declared: “So America has been struck by Allah at its most vulnerable point, destroying, thank God, its most prestigious buildings, and we thank Allah for this. So the whole of America has been filled with terror, and we thank God for this. . . . God has guided the steps of a group of Muslims, a group of radicals who have destroyed America, and we implore Allah to raise their status and to welcome them into heaven.”

I have chosen these four events because they demonstrate most clearly the role attributed by human beings to gods. When the Taliban blew up the Buddhas of Bamiyan, they claimed that it was Allah who could not tolerate representations of alien gods. Although mandated for hygienic reasons, the ban on animal sacrifices, whether according to Muslim or to Jewish rituals, was actually resented by the French and Belgian communities as an affront to their respective Gods. The attack on the Muslim (Bosnian and Kosovan) communities and the Catholic (Croatian) community by Milosevic can also be understood as an attack by the deity of Orthodox Christianity against the deities of the Muslims and Roman Catholics. Finally, the terrorist attack of September 11 against the United States was explicitly represented by its originator as the work of Allah.

The strife in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kashmir, France, and many other places since 2001 confirms that the gods are still at war.

The Heterogeneity of the Gods

I am aware that the proposition I am making is unusual and that most observers attribute only a secondary role to religion in our present crisis. Moreover, to accept the explanation that I suggest, we must admit that there are differences between gods, whereas the nineteenth-century ideology that continues to guide intellectuals and journalists holds that all deities are expressions of a single idea. To accept my notion, we must admit that, despite their similarities and indeed the influence they exert on one another, the deity of the Jews is different from the deity of the Catholics who differs from that of the Orthodox who differs from that of the Protestants who differs from that of the Sunni who differs from that of the Shiites who differs from the plethora of Indian gods and the multitude of Buddhas.

But however difficult it may be to give up an old idea for a still older one, it seems to me that admitting the heterogeneity of gods is the prime condition for the advent of peace. Peace can only result from our recognizing the remarkable similarity of human beings despite the heterogeneity of their gods. It is useful—therapeutic—to imagine that the conflicts of 2001 to 2004 have been acts of divine aggression, one deity against another: that Allah destroyed the Buddhas of Bamiyan; that the European ban on animal sacrifices has been the work of the Catholic God and the Protestant God against the Gods of the Muslims and Jews, that the genocides in Yugoslavia were acts of the Orthodox God against the Muslim and Catholic Gods, and that the terrorist attack of September 11 was the work of Allah against the God of the Protestants. The Indo-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir can, in the same way, be regarded as an ominous indication of antagonism between the Muslim and Indian deities. With some practice, we can easily imagine the earth as an arena of confrontation between divinities, each of which perseveres in its plan—plans that should by now be obsolete—for the total conquest of the world.

A Parliament of Gods

Who can make gods understand that they must share the world with their peers, that none of them has any hope of establishing an exclusive, universal monotheism? Certainly not an adherent or one god or another, still less an atheist (who makes the same claim as monotheists do, though sans god).

Isaiah 11:6–10 was thus a genuine prophecy and a surprising peace proposal. We will come to need, Isaiah saw, a new, unexpected force, an unprecedented event, to bring about liaisons among divinities that, given their nature, can do nothing but pursue their own selfish schemes, each in its limited world. Isaiah made this shocking announcement in the manner of his time, by describing the arrival of a savior: "And it shall come to pass in that day, / That the root of Jesse, that standeth for an ensign of the peoples, / Unto him shall the nations seek; / And his resting-place shall be glorious" (11:10). The prophet of the Jewish God could represent the distant future only in terms of unnatural meetings between animal species. Looking back from 2004, we might say that he meant: And Allah shall dwell with Kali and Jesus shall sit back with the Buddha . . .

Isaiah's proposal is unacceptable even today. No one will attribute to anyone, not even to a savior in the line of Jesse, the power to retrain gods to get along. Given modern politics, we would need to imagine a parliament of gods in which each god is represented and human beings teach them parliamentary procedure. The hardest problem would be choosing divine representatives. No religious leader could be credentialed in such a parliament—not that I am casting doubt on the integrity of religious leaders or on their intelligence. But their very function makes them unlikely to consider the interests of gods other than their own. The religious are like their gods in that they often defend, and even more vehemently, the political expansion that is the destiny of their god. No politician could be credentialed either, given the natural tendency of politicians to ignore the needs of gods. We would have to find representatives for the gods among those strange human beings who, without abandoning their own kind, without renouncing their divine owners, love their neighbors' gods as well—love all gods so much that the differences between gods, their peculiarities, become a deep concern.

My proposal, or rather Isaiah's, will seem dangerous to some, who will fear that by recognizing differences between gods, that by invoking the specific needs, the necessities, the demands imposed by gods on their adherents, we will intensify the reasons for conflicts between their peoples. There is an elderly, recurrent idea that, if we were all creatures of the same god, we would love each other as a logical consequence, all of us citizens of the same world, children of the same parent. A bizarre idea: as if the descendants of one ancestor had a natural inclination toward peace with one another. History affords numerous examples of civil war and fratricide. As if love were an antidote to war!—the most banal kind of psychology has shown that life brims with examples of love transformed swiftly into hatred.

Peace is a conquest, an undertaking. It can only result from hard work. If we consider how difficult peace is to achieve, we will realize that it requires the skills of a specialized being. Isaiah foresaw a king as herald of a messianic era. I propose a parliament that, while political, will exist to teach coexistence to gods. But let me issue a warning against false solutions that come from erroneous readings of Isaiah's prophesy. "Loving one's neighbor's god" (my proposal and, I believe, Isaiah's) is not the same as—is really the opposite of—"exchanging knowledge" during "encounters between religions." The parliamentary process would give each god (as it gives political parties on a secular plane) a means to meet their most profound aspirations and needs. We must take a deliberate stand against quests for "good will," for "sharing," where the wolf would believe himself a lamb. We must accept a situation in which we will be filled with terror. For the gravest danger is the lukewarm state between religions: its only result can be to intensify the violence between gods whose needs are not being acknowledged, while hiding the unprecedented, cataclysmic nature of a clash between starving gods.

There remains a final question to answer. Some will think that my interpretation of Isaiah's text is too far removed from all those now on the books. I need thus to present one last argument for my reading. It is said that Isaiah was executed on the order of King Menasseh. The way the Babylonian Talmud narrates his death shows how Isaiah is remembered by the Jews in terms of incredible couplings and exchanges between biological kinds:

> Isaiah thought to himself: "I know that, in any case [Menasseh] will not accept whatever justification I tell him. And if I do inform him of my rationale in each case, only harm will emerge, because I will thereby render him an intentional murderer when he ignores these explanations and executes me anyway." Instead, in an effort to escape, [Isaiah] uttered a Divine Name and was swallowed up within a cedar tree. So [Menasseh's men] brought the cedar tree and split it with an axe. When [the axe] reached [Isaiah's] mouth, he passed away.[10]

Unlike Myrrha, metamorphosed into a tree before giving birth to Adonis, Isaiah underwent no metamorphosis. He was swallowed by a cedar, and his death thus exemplifies his prophecy: biological kingdoms turned upside down, the vegetable becoming carnivorous and the human turned into food. A final message, no doubt, from Isaiah, iterating one last time, beyond death, his irenic advice: favor impossible alliances, establish unpredictable links between heterogeneous entities in order to create peace.

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10. Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 49:2.